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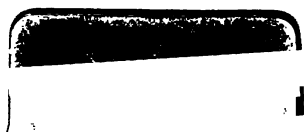
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ARGUS FAIRBAIRN.

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ARGUS FAIRBAIRN.

BY

HENRY JACKSON,

AUTHOR OF "GILBERT RUGGE," "HEARTH GHOSTS," ETC., ETC.

"That which is crooked cannot be made straight."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



London :

SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, LOW, & SEARLE,
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BOOK THE FOURTH.

NEAR AND YET FAR OFF.

VOL. II.

B

ARGUS FAIRBAIRN.

CHAPTER I.

CROSSING PATHS.

WHEN the proprietor of Llantgarvon Abbey honoured his “ancestral halls,” as he mockingly termed his Welsh country house, with his presence, the fact was always notified to the neighbourhood by the hoisting of a flag on the clock-turret and the appearance of his yacht in Llantgarvon Bay. With the flag Mr. Brande could have dispensed (only his house-steward would not have let him), but without the “Evangeline”—his beautiful yacht

—he would have been a disconsolate man. Mr. Brande never knew any morning whether a desire to start on a distant journey might not seize him ere night came. The Yankee love of locomotion and spirit of curiosity engrafted on the Englishman's natural roving tendencies had made of him an incurable wanderer; and though he had a house in London, another in Yorkshire, and a third in Wales, he was as likely to be heard of at Spitzbergen or Cape Matapan as at any of the above-named places. Another peculiarity of his was that he visited his residences just when the whim seized him. May would find him at Llantgarvon amongst cuckoos and spring flowers, and September would see him taking a solitary ride in the faded and frowsy precincts of Hyde Park. Some people said he "went in" for misanthropy

and eccentricity. Possibly. In any case, he made his own personal inclinations the first guide of life, and systematically set himself in opposition to all conventionalities, whether moral, political, or social.

This might have been hereditary. His father, a younger brother of the late colonel, had distinguished himself at Cambridge, had been called to the bar, and was intended to represent the family borough in Parliament. But he took up what his friends considered extreme Radical notions, scandalized his family by throwing up his profession and prospects, and going off to the United States, where he eventually married a wife with a large fortune. Friends at home, of course, whispered "shoddy" when the fortune was talked of; but Miss Boyne was the daughter of a learned judge, and a lady of great refinement and beauty. Their

only son had been born in Paris during their first visit to Europe, but they returned to America, where their son had been brought up and educated. After his father and mother's death he had mostly resided on this side of the Atlantic ; and since inheriting the family property in England, he had generally spent some portion of the year on his estate in Wales, where, having a fine residence, he could entertain his friends, both English and American, in hospitable fashion.

This present autumn an unusual number of visitors is expected at Llantgarvon Abbey, and though it is but three days since the flag was run up on the clock-turret, there are already a dozen or more guests under Mr. Brande's roof.

The shadow of the flag falls this bright autumn morning on two figures on the

tower-top. One of them is Mr. Brande, smoking an early cigar; the other, a young man, who is watching through a telescope a yacht passing out of the bay in the early morning sunlight. He is a handsome, well-made young fellow, with a face that would have been very frank and winning but for a tendency to drop his eyes when looked at, and a sudden knitting of the brows at moments. The eyes were fine eyes when they did regard you openly—deep blue, and with a sort of pathos in them which alternated with a latent fire, that kindled suddenly under excitement.

“What a beauty she is! She is rounding the Head in splendid style!” he exclaims, as the “Evangeline” disappears round the promontory.

“‘And when she had passed, it seemed like the ceasing of exquisite music,’ eh?” laughs

Mr. Brande, quoting the words applied by the poet to her namesake ; "I believe you're getting as fond of her as I am, Gus."

"When will she be back?" asked the young man, shutting up the telescope.

"By to-morrow afternoon, with this wind—that is, if the people they are going to meet at Swansea are punctual."

"Is the Signora a good sailor?"

"What Signora?"

"I thought the lady came from Italy?"

Mr. Brande smiled.

"So she did last month, but she's no more a Signora than I'm a Copperhead. She was born, sir, in the parish of St. Pancras, and lisped the *dolce lingua* of Cockaigne in her childhood."

"She sings very finely, doesn't she?"

"Like a nightingale, you would say, but like a well-trained musician, I hope."

"I should like to hear her. There's nothing beats good singing."

"Well, you may soon have your wish, unless Miss Meadows is as chary of her powers of pleasing as would-be Prima Donnas are wont to be. She'll make a mistake, however, if she doesn't try to please my guests, for I've invited lots of folks on purpose to hear her;" and after a little further discussion of the lady, Mr. Brande and Argus Fairbairn descended to breakfast.

The relation between Mr. Staynes' pupil and the owner of Llantgarvon had grown very cordial, as will be perceived, since the day when the former was caught trespassing in the plantation. Mr. Brande had taken a fancy to Gus on that occasion, and had often invited him and his companion over to the Abbey. His yacht was

an unfailing attraction to the young men ; and when Gus discovered that Mr. Brande was also the possessor of an organ, he thought him the most desirable acquaintance in the world. Now that Argus Fairbairn was an undergraduate of ——— College, Oxford, with incipient whiskers, he was invited to join Mr. Brande's shooting-parties (that gentleman derided the English passion for bird-slaughter, and never touched a gun himself), and he had occasionally the honour of meeting Mr. Brande's guests at dinner.

Gus had come over to breakfast this morning to join the shooting-party for the day ; and when they entered the breakfast-room, he felt rather shy at the sight of the dozen strangers at the table. There were two ladies present ; one of them an aunt of Mr. Brande's, who played hostess,

Mrs. Boyne Whittaker by name, an American lady with immense conversational powers; the other a delicate-looking woman, dressed in mourning, with a very agreeable, but a rather sad face. Noticing the shy air of Gus, this lady drew him into conversation, and soon put him at his ease. She had a very pleasant voice and manner, and Gus thought her one of the most charming ladies he had ever met, by the time breakfast was over. They had found plenty to talk about: the lady knew Mr. Staynes and Ned Bannister, and she seemed to know Gus too, for she called him "Mr. Fairbairn" without being introduced.

"I hope, Mrs. Severn, your husband is not tired with his journey?" said the host, turning to the lady, as they rose from the table.

“Not in the least; he had his breakfast an hour ago. He is an early riser, and is probably already at work.”

“Oh, is it Mr. Severn you are speaking of? I met him going over to the Rectory as I came along,” said Gus, now discovering who this kind lady was.

“An early visitor, is he not?” said Mrs. Severn; “but they are old friends, Mr. Staynes and my husband, and are always glad to meet.”

Gus Fairbairn and Mr. Severn had met that morning mid-way in the wood that lay between the Rectory and the Abbey. The younger man, with gun on shoulder, was whistling gaily as he stepped briskly along; the elder man was walking slowly, with his head bent in thought. At the sound of footsteps, Mr. Severn had raised his head and beheld through a break in

the trees the advancing figure. The dappled sunlight fell on Argus Fairbairn's face: his hat was in his hand, for the morning was warm; a lock of curly hair straggled over his forehead. Mr. Severn stopped. That youthful sun-flecked face and straggling lock of hair recalled another youthful face with waving hair—a face which Mr. Severn had last beheld amidst the lights and shadows of a wood; and he stood arrested at the sight.

Recognizing the gentleman as one of Mr. Brande's friends, Gus raised his hat as he approached.

"I beg your pardon; I really did not know you," said Mr. Severn, quite hurriedly. "It is Mr. Staynes' pupil, I believe?"

"Yes; and you are Mr. Severn, I think?"

"I am. Shall I find Mr. Staynes at home?"

"I believe you will, if you make haste; but he goes early on his parish round. You had better cut across that by-path yonder. It saves half a mile."

"Thank you. You are very much grown, Mr. —, I really forget your name?"

"Fairbairn," said Gus, who did not care to be reminded of his growth, as though he were still only a lad; and, after a few more words, he wished Mr. Severn good morning, and passed on again.

"He may be clever, but he's a haughty sort of fellow, and looks proud as Lucifer," said Gus to himself; and he made up his mind that he did not intend to be patronized by him, "or any of the

swells " at the Abbey, as he pursued his way through the wood.

Mr. Severn and Gus did not meet again until the latter part of the day, when they encountered on the terrace as the sportsmen were returning home.

After a few words with some of the elder men, Mr. Severn turned to Fairbairn, and asked him what luck he had had.

" Oh, very bad ! I'm only a poor shot," was the reply.

Gus looked mortified ; he had been particularly unlucky to-day.

" Your successes lie in other directions, I expect," said Mr. Severn pleasantly. " My friend Mr. Staynes tells me that he looks forward to your doing him credit at Oxford."

" I don't know, I'm sure," was the reply.

"I hope Mr. Staynes mayn't be disappointed."

"You could not be in better hands, in any case," said Mr. Severn.

"I don't think I could," said the young man; and then, not liking this personal tone of conversation from a comparative stranger, he whistled one of the dogs to him, and walked up the terrace-steps.

That night Gus again found himself taken under Mrs. Severn's wing in the drawing-room. He sat shyly turning over a portfolio in a corner when she came up to him, and said she had been calling at the Rectory that afternoon, and had heard from Miss Staynes that he was very musical—Would he not play something? But he replied that his performances were chiefly on the organ, and that he should frighten Mr. Brande out of the room if

he opened the piano; "He is horribly critical!" said Gus.

The subject of music was one, however, on which Gus was always enthusiastic, and he talked away with Mrs. Severn on this topic, and spoke with such admiration of Mr. Brande's fine organ, that she expressed a wish to hear it, and asked the host when it would be practicable.

"Now if you like," said he. "The room is always lighted in the evening; and as half the people seem bent on whist, and Mrs. Whittaker is entertaining the other half with her views on mesmerism, we will steal off, and Fairbairn shall give us a little music."

The organ stood in a vaulted chamber which had formerly been the private chapel of the abbey. Mr. Brande had converted it into a music-room, and given

warmth and colour to its sombre precincts by judicious decorations and abundance of light. The organ sounded finely, and Gus played with considerable taste. Mrs. Severn sat and listened with pleasure and some surprise. Every now and then Mr. Brande commented on his playing—not always favourably.

“You must have practised a deal,” said Mrs. Severn; “that is a difficult movement.”

“Mr. Brande is good enough to let me have the key of the room when he is away, and so I come here whenever I like; and then at Oxford I have made the acquaintance of an organist, who lets me practise occasionally,” said Gus.

“Let us hear something from Mozart’s ‘Requiem,’” said Mr. Brande; “and don’t hurry the pace.”

As the solemn and pathetic tones swelled out, Mrs. Severn listened with a beating heart. She was keenly sensitive to music, and Gus's playing touched and pleased her. Even Mr. Brande found no fault this time.

"How well he plays!" said Mrs. Severn, as they sat discussing the performance on their return to the drawing-room, after Gus had taken his departure.

"Yes; he has a good musical organization. I often tell him he would make a better fiddler than a parson."

"Is he going into the Church, then?" asked Mrs. Severn.

"Well, I have an idea that his mother wishes it—at least, he seems to fear it."

"It is a mistake to force a young man's inclinations in such a matter," said Mrs. Severn.

“Yes; the cowl doesn’t make the monk, does it? Fairbairn would do small credit to his cloth, I guess.”

“But he may do himself credit in other ways, I imagine, under favourable circumstances,” replied Mrs. Severn. “I have taken a liking to your young friend, Mr. Brande, and have seldom met a young man of his age who interested me so much on a short acquaintance.”

“He is rather a favourite of mine,” said the host. “He doesn’t seem to have many friends, saving that excellent parson, who is mightily fond of him, and keeps him, as well as the rest of us down here, in order.”

CHAPTER II.

A NEW SINGER.

ON the following morning the “Evangeline” appeared in Llantgarvon Bay, bearing on board the expected guests, and a fine new Broadwood piano, which had come down from London expressly for their use. Gus was waiting on the shore when the yacht came in, and as soon as a young lady and an elderly gentleman had landed he approached them, and raising his hat, said,—

“I am commissioned by Mr. Brande to explain that he is unable to meet you this

afternoon. There is a carriage waiting for you at a little inn near, which will take you on to the Abbey. Will you allow me to show you the way?"

The young lady whom Gus addressed eyed him over rather superbly. She was a handsome young lady, with large eyes, a fine complexion, and a decided way of speaking.

"I hope it's not far," said she. "Pa has been dreadfully sea-sick."

Professor Meadows presented a melancholy spectacle. His face was of a sea-green hue, his wig was awry, and his whole bearing expressed extreme physical and moral depression.

"Young gentleman," he gasped, "excuse the freedom, but if you cou—could tell me where to procure a thimble-full of brandy, I should be grateful."

The Professor's attempts at a bow and a polite demeanour were a melancholy failure.

"Certainly," said Gus. "There is an inn close by. Will you take my arm, sir?" he added good-naturedly, for the poor gentleman could hardly keep on his legs.

"Thank you," said Miss Meadows, looking relieved. "You say it is not far?"

"Oh, quite near. Will you allow me to carry your cloak?"

"Much obliged. What a horrid thing sea-sickness is! though I love the sea myself, and have enjoyed the voyage immensely."

Miss Meadows looked as if she had. The sea air had imparted a fine colour to her cheeks, and her face was bright and animated. Neither in looks nor dress did she betray any traces of the voyage. She

was as carefully attired as if she had just stepped out of her dressing-room, and her bonnet was of the latest Paris fashion.

When he had partaken of the brandy, the Professor was still so prostrated that he had to be assisted into the carriage. Gus could hardly do other than offer to accompany them to the Abbey.

“Pa will be better presently,” said Miss Meadows, in reply to Gus’s solicitude, as they drove along. “He always was a bad sailor; and he ought not to have eaten lobster at luncheon. Here, Pa, take my toilet vinegar, and don’t look at anything. What a lovely place this seems!”

They were passing up the valley, and at every minute the view grew finer. The autumnal tints in the woods, the red and brown rocks peering through the foliage, the sunshine and the blue sea that showed

a wider expanse with every step they mounted, made a fine picture. Miss Meadows seemed quite alive to its beauties, and uttered many exclamations of delight.

“At the next turn you will get a good view of the Abbey,” said Gus, pleased at this enthusiasm.

“My gracious, what a grand place it is !” cried Miss Meadows unaffectedly, as the house appeared in sight. “Pa, you *must* open your eyes a minute. Isn’t it lovely ? I suppose there are lots of visitors staying there ?”

The young lady glanced down at her dress as she spoke. What a comfort she was all right in that respect ! Gus next pointed out Llantgarvon Head and the other features of the coast scenery, and Miss Meadows listened to him with such interest, and made such funny, naïve re-

marks, that he was charmed with her, and quite sorry when the carriage drove up to the hall door, and he had to bid her good day.

"I'm sure we are much obliged to you for your kindness," said Miss Meadows graciously, as she alighted ; and Gus went away, regretting that he had not been invited to dine at the Abbey that night.

A few hours later, Miss Meadows sat talking with Mr. Brande in the library, where she had dined alone, not caring to meet Mr. Brande's guests till her boxes were unpacked.

"I hope you managed all right on arriving?" said the host, explaining the reason of his absence that afternoon.

"Oh, yes, thank you," replied Miss Meadows ; "that nice, good-natured lad made himself very useful."

Mr. Gus would have been pleased to know his services had been appreciated, but he would have been desperately offended had he heard Miss Meadows speak of him as a "lad."

"How has your father been of late—I mean in— in—health?" inquired Mr. Brande, hesitating for a word.

"I understand. Much better, thanks," said Miss Meadows, smiling significantly. "The light wines suited him; and after you left us in Paris, I never let him have more than five francs at a time in his pocket. We had famous rows, of course, every now and then. He would run out on to the staircase and cry out that he was a '*père malheureux*,' or he would begin to tell the public from the window that he had a '*figlia ingrata*' within, only luckily neither his French nor his Italian made much im-

pression on the hearers. When we had a break-out of this sort, I used immediately to begin to pack up my things and sit down to write to you, to say Pa had broken his agreement, and that we were coming home by the next train: that generally calmed him."

"And you made the money last out pretty well?" asked Mr. Brande, as Miss Meadows went into further details concerning their life abroad.

"Of course I did, and kept strict account' too, as I promised you I would, balancing my cash every Saturday night, like any little shopkeeper. It was generally on a Saturday night that Pa and I had our quarrels; for when I came to settle with the folks, I used to find out he had borrowed money of the concierge, or had forgotten to pay some bill for which I

had given him the money, and then we had a nice disturbance. Talking of bills, here are the whole lot, and an account of all we spent."

"I always knew you were a practical person," said Mr. Brande, as he cast his eye over Miss Meadows' account-book; "but really I never gave you credit for such business qualities."

"Ah, you don't know me yet! You don't know how I worked away yonder, to get rid of those 'raven notes' you used to talk about, and to acquire 'better style,' and all the rest. But if I hadn't felt it would be like cheating you out of goods for which you had paid your money, I really think I should have given it up in disgust long ago."

"Disgust! What for—your art?" asked Mr. Brande.

"No; disgust at my own singing. You don't know what it is to have to cure bad habits—musical bad habits, I mean; I won't answer for your ignorance of others. I've often cried with vexation to think of what a fool I used to make of myself as the Miniature Malibran. That girl ought to have had her ears boxed for attempting Handel."

"You have grown more critical, I see," said Mr. Brande, smiling.

"I should hope I have. Talking of being critical, have you heard from Mowbray Mott yet?"

"Not a word."

"Then he's going against me. It's a shame! He promised you an early answer."

"He'll give it when he has heard you sing, no doubt—not before."

“ Oh, bother ! He’s as difficult to get near as royalty, and more. I have heard say, he keeps folks waiting in his back drawing-room in Queen Anne Street for hours and hours, and then slips out of the front door, and sends up the footman to say he is making arrangements for a state concert at Buckingham Palace, and can’t possibly see Miss Norma Smith or Signor Rigoletto to-day. I expect he will turn up his nose at me, when he knows I’m the original Malibran in Miniature.

“ He shall hear you, then, without knowing,” said Mr. Brande, “ and that before many hours. He is in this house at this moment.”

“ Now that’s something like ! ” exclaimed Miss Meadows, her face brightening suddenly. “ I call that being prompt and

business-like; and I like business-like people.'

And after a little more conversation, the manner of Miss Meadows' introduction to Mr. Mott the following evening was arranged.

It was about ten o'clock the next night that the buzz of conversation in Mr. Brande's drawing-room was arrested by the uprising of a powerful soprano voice, pouring out the grand music of the "Orfeo" of Glück. Every one listened with attention, for the voice was above the ordinary quality of drawing-room singing. Mr. Mowbray Mott, discussing Wagner and the latest musical developments with Mrs. Whittaker, got up, jerked his eye-glass into his right eye, and looked over the heads of the people (he was six feet high) at the songstress.

"That's no amateur," said he, turning to Mrs. Whittaker when the song was ended. "Who is she?"

"A new star, perhaps. My nephew makes the strangest and most interesting acquaintances," said the lady slyly: she was of course in the secret.

Mr. Mott had no notion of new stars rising in the musical firmament without his cognizance, and replied that the lady was "an old stager more likely."

"No, quite young, as you can see, and very good-looking. She is going to sing again; hush!"

This time Miss Meadows chose a song of Schubert, full of grace and melancholy, and so well did she acquit herself, that Mr. Mott approached the piano, and after another good stare through his eye-glass, asked his host for an introduction.

“What do you think of the lady’s singing?” said the latter.

“I think if she isn’t in the profession she ought to be; but I have a suspicion that lady has faced larger audiences than this many a time. What perfect aplomb she has! Who is she?”

“Well, that’s her secret, and not mine,” said Mr. Brande, desiring to stimulate Mr. Mott’s curiosity. “But I think I may tell you that you have a chance of introducing a new favourite to the British public, if you play your cards well. That elderly gentleman who accompanied her is her father, formerly a music master. I made their acquaintance by chance, before they went abroad to finish the lady’s musical education. She has returned with a heap of testimonials from foreign pro-

fessors, some of them acquaintances of yours, I've no doubt."

And having thus excited Mr. Mott's interest in Miss Meadows, he proceeded to introduce that lady to one of the best known musical critics of the day.

CHAPTER III.

AN OLD WELSH AIR.

AMONGST the listeners in the drawing-room at Llantgarvon the evening when Miss Meadows first displayed her talents to her patron's guests, was a young man who went home in such a state of enthusiasm and excitement that he hardly slept all night for thinking of the syren and her songs. The young man possessed (as Mr. Brande had already remarked) an exceptional musical organization; and not having yet heard much good vocal music, Miss Meadows' singing was a new revelation

to him. A ripe critic like Mr. Mott might take a less exalted view of the lady's powers and performance, but to Gus it was absolute perfection; and then she had such a fine face and eyes, and such dignity and grace (we quote Gus's impressions), that the young fellow was fairly captivated, and sang the praises of this wonderful creature all breakfast-time next morning. He felt a little hurt, it is true, that the lady had taken no notice of him—not even recognized him by a bow; but, then, as he reminded himself, she was surrounded by people after her first song, and a hideously ugly man with an eye-glass and red beard (this was pure prejudice, Mr. Mott's beard was a fine ruddy brown, and his features were classical) had monopolized her all the rest of the evening. Soon after breakfast Gus started off for the Abbey,

with a volume of music under his arm.

"Where are you going?" cried Mr. Staynes from the window, as the young man crossed the lawn.

"I am taking these for Mrs. Severn to look over, she wants some organ music for her church at home."

"I thought we were going to begin work to-day? You have had a long spell of idleness, Gus."

"All right, sir. I'll make up for it when I set to it again." And the young man went off humming to himself one of the songs he had heard over-night.

"If he would throw the same zeal into his work that he does into his play, he would soon arrive at distinction, mother," said Mr. Staynes, with a regretful air.

"Ah, let him take his pleasure whilst he

may!" replied the old lady, with that indulgent tone she always adopted when speaking of her son's pupil, "he'll have his share of anxieties and trouble some day, Hugh—more than his share, I should not wonder."

Perhaps it was some unrecognized fear of this sort that often made Mr. Staynes more indulgent towards the young man than his judgment approved.

But Gus went on his way this morning, light-hearted as any youth of twenty in the land. When he arrived at the Abbey he found the ladies in the morning-room, a pretty, sunny chamber opening out into a conservatory. None of the gentlemen were present; and the ladies were about to enjoy a little music now they had got Miss Meadows quietly to themselves. That young lady, in a fashionable morning

dress (the effect of which was marred by some showy but common jewellery), was selecting a song as Gus entered.

“You have come just in time,” said Mrs. Severn, when she had thanked Gus for the music-book.

Gus thought himself a lucky fellow to be admitted to this privileged audience, and said as much. He sat and listened with greedy ears as soon as Miss Meadows commenced. Desiring to make good impressions, she sang several songs. Gus had never been so pleased in his life, and forgetting his shyness, he approached the piano, whilst the ladies were talking, and warmly expressed his admiration.

Looking up at him with her large eyes, Miss Meadows replied,—

“Ah, you’re the obliging young man

who helped us the other day. Do you like music?"

"Better than anything," said he, blushing.

"Well, I think I do too," said the lady. "You know this, I suppose?"

"Yes; I heard you sing it last night. It was glorious."

"Did you? I didn't know you were in the room. I had hard work to keep my countenance over it, for there was a little man with an eye-glass, who stood at the foot of the piano, and he squinted so that I nearly laughed."

Gus was a little disappointed to hear that Miss Meadows had felt an inclination to laugh whilst singing music from the "Orfeo;" and he was sorry she called him an "obliging young man;" but these things were forgotten or swallowed up in admira-

tion when she began to sing again. Her voice had gained in strength and richness, and some of her notes had a tenderness and depth in them that affected Gus almost painfully.

“How beautiful!” he exclaimed, when she had done; and he added, slowly and with evident sincerity, “I think nobody could sing it so well as that.”

“You wouldn’t say so, if you had heard Alboni,” replied Melusina candidly; “but I like folks to be enthusiastic, and I do love being praised.”

There was something charming in this frankness, thought Gus, and he was fascinated by it. Besides, it was delightful to see an artiste so unaffected and so modest about her powers.

“As we are in Wales, suppose you give us something national, Miss Meadows,”

said Mrs. Whittaker, approaching the piano. "Do you know any old Welsh melodies?"

As Miss Meadows used to be advertised to sing "the national melodies of all nations" in the days when she was the Miniature Malibran, she could hardly plead ignorance; so, after a little searching in her memory, she chose a plaintive old Welsh air, full of pathos. Gus knew it at the first bar. He had heard his mother sing it many a time in his Australian home; and, as he listened, he beheld again his mother's sweet face and mournful eyes, and felt her arms about him, rocking him to sleep. It was not often that he saw her face so plainly now-a-days, nor that his imagination pictured her so tenderly. He was completely overcome; and he sat with the tears welling up into his

eyes, which were fixed intently on the singer.

Now, either there was rare power in Miss Meadows' singing, or rare sensibility amongst her hearers; for inside the conservatory stood another listener, who had just approached—a man of middle age, and somewhat stern features—and he also seemed affected by the song. In a mirror opposite her, Mrs. Severn could see this person's face; it was her husband's, and its expression startled her. There were no tears upon his cheek, as on the younger man's, but there was an intenser sadness written on his face. The emotion visible on the two countenances caused a curious resemblance between them at that moment—a passing resemblance that vanished with the ending of the song. Mrs. Severn noted it and wondered, as her eye glanced

from one to the other, to see two persons of such different ages and temperaments so strongly affected by the same causes.

To hide his emotion, Gus rose as soon as the song ended, and passed out quickly into the conservatory, where, catching sight of Mr. Severn, he turned away and walked out into the garden. The elder man stood and regarded the younger one as he paced the path outside.

"He is very impressionable, is he not?" said his wife at his elbow. Mrs. Severn was also watching Gus, and did not notice how her husband started at her voice.

"Did you observe how he was affected by the singing?" she asked.

"I hardly saw his face," was the reply.

"I think, young-man-like, he was ashamed to show it with tears on it," continued Mrs. Severn. "He seems shy

and proud; but I like him, and more so since I heard how they spoke of him yesterday at the Rectory."

"They are very fond of him, I suppose?" said Mr. Severn, speaking in an absent way.

"Yes; having had the care of him all these years, I think Mr. Staynes regards him almost as a son. He has been with them more than ten years, they tell me; a long time, never to have seen his father and mother, is it not?"

"A long time; but they live on the other side of the globe, which I suppose is the reason," replied Mr. Severn. "One can hardly fancy a father and mother being indifferent about a son—and such a son as that," he continued, looking at Argus Fairbairn with thoughtful eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

AN ARTISTE'S DREAMS.

MISS MEADOWS was delighted with her reception at Llantgarvon, and her successful introduction to the great Mr. Mott. From the latter's civilities she even augured brilliant professional engagements in the future, and artistic triumphs such as her fancy loved to paint. But at this period of her life Miss Meadows was a sanguine young woman, and, though possessed of plenty of natural shrewdness, and a knowledge of the world quite unusual in persons of her age and sex, was apt to take

exaggerated views of the successes in store for her. She did not realize that Mr. Mott beheld her at Llantgarvon Abbey under a certain glamour thrown around her by the fashionable folks she was surrounded by. She did not know that a weakness for fashionable life was amongst Mr. Mott's foibles; and how should poor Miss Meadows have suspected that she would wear quite a different aspect in his eyes, and her singing even be less melodious to his ears, when hereafter he should meet her in shabby London lodgings?

If Gus Fairbairn could have known that Mr. Mott took such ignoble views of things, he would have hated him more than ever, and his desire to pick a quarrel with him would have been intensified, no doubt. But Gus never dreamed that such irreverence was possible. He fancied no

mortal could behold Miss Meadows without at once feeling a desire to become her slave and do her bidding to the death. He had never conceived that Nature, in her most lavish mood, could have combined in one individual so many charms of mind and person. If Miss Meadows had squinted, her singing would still have made her a most attractive woman. If she could not have sung a note, her beauty would have rendered her irresistible. Even Miss Meadows' papa was endowed with graces reflected from his child, though the Professor, to a dispassionate observer, was not altogether a pleasing gentleman. His Roman nose was as red as ever, his conversation as florid and flattering, and his manners were—well, not quite those of the best society. So obvious were these things to some folks, that it had been arranged

that Miss Meadows' papa was not to dine with the other guests, but only to meet them in the drawing-room when his services were required at the piano. Mr. Meadows informed Gus that this isolation was necessitated by his health, late dinners being strictly forbidden him by his medical adviser; but he contrived to eat a capital dinner every day in the private sitting-room allotted to him, and his daughter regulated the amount of wine he took with a watchful eye.

Gus was a frequent visitor to their little room, and spent many delightful hours listening to the Professor's eulogies of his daughter. Melusina's talents as an infant, and her filial virtues as a young woman, formed a theme of inexhaustible interest to both. Mr. Meadows would grow quite pathetic thereon. "Ah! my young friend,"

he would say, looking at Gus, "you too have a soul for music, and can enter into my feelings; to you I can unbosom myself. Speaking as a musician and a father, I believe there is not an angel in yonder bright regions" (pointing upwards to the ceiling) "who has a better heart or a finer ear for harmony than my child;" and Gus would look as though he fully believed it too. Occasionally the Professor would take up his guitar and tingle away an accompaniment to a Spanish song (or what he called such); or he would relate remarkable stories about his own voice in his youth, and hint darkly at the temptations to which his talents and attractive appearance had exposed him (from duchesses chiefly) in the days when he taught singing and the guitar amongst the aristocracy. But better than all, there were blissful

moments when Melusina looked in upon them, dressed for dinner, or radiant in evening costume; and then Gus would return home to the Rectory quite dazzled with the vision. He was always finding pretexts for coming over to see Mr. Meadows, whom he honestly believed to be an unappreciated genius, and whose solitude he felt it an honour to share. Naturally Mr. Meadows was touched by these attentions.

“If we had more such patrons and lovers of art as yourself amongst our youthful aristocracy, Mr. Fairbairn, we poor singers and players would occupy a different standing before the world,” said Mr. Meadows one afternoon.

“Pray don’t count me amongst your youthful aristocracy,” said Gus, disclaiming the compliment, but secretly not disliking the idea.

"I know a gentleman, a born gentleman, when I meet him, sir," was the Professor's graceful reply.

In ten days' time such cordiality had sprung up between the two, that Mr. Meadows had confided many personal and family secrets to his young friend, and Gus had come to the conclusion that for many years Fate had made a dead set against a most deserving and gifted gentleman, and all his kith and kin.

"I hope old Meadows has not been borrowing money of you; you seem high in his favour," said Mr. Brande one day, meeting Gus leaving the Professor's room.

"I lent Mr. Meadows five shillings the other day, to buy some stamps when he had no change, if you call that borrowing," said Gus, colouring slightly.

"Ah! Mr. Meadows buys his stamps,

I'm afraid, at the 'Boyne Arms.' Don't do it again, Gus. He's a sly old fox. I must speak to his daughter."

"I beg you won't," said Gus hastily.

"She—she might think—"

"Well?"

"I had told you, and that I was afraid of losing my money."

"Which would be high treason, wouldn't it?" laughed Mr. Brande. "Trust me not to compromise you in Miss Meadows' good graces. I know you are one of her most devoted admirers."

Gus hardly liked joking on this subject. There was something in Mr. Brande's tone when speaking of Miss Meadows which grated on his feelings, a tone which he felt to be disrespectful. So he rather abruptly changed the subject, without telling Mr. Brande, however, that the Pro-

fessor had since asked for the loan of a larger sum than five shillings, and that he had lent him it, to the detriment, it was to be feared, of a certain tailor in Oxford.

A few days later the party at the Abbey broke up. Mr. Mott had already gone away, leaving behind him that pleasant impression as to impending professional engagements which so cheered Miss Meadows' hopes. Mrs. Whittaker was due in Paris, where she had a fine residence in the Avenue de l'Impératrice, to which she invited everybody staying at Llantgarvon for her Thursday evenings. "You must come and sing to my friends, and get known in the art circles of Paris," said she to Miss Meadows, with that vagueness which distinguishes some people's invitations. Miss Meadows, in her matter-

of-fact manner, replied that she thought London paid better than Paris; but she would be obliged for Mrs. Whittaker's patronage in either place. Then Miss Meadows went up-stairs to pack her boxes, and see that her papa was properly attired for travelling, and did not disgrace her before the servants at the moment of departure. A carriage was to convey them to the nearest town, where they were to take the train for London.

At leave-taking, the Professor was profuse in thanks, and quite overcome with emotion. "On quitting this hospitable mansion, sir," said he, addressing his host with uncovered head, "I carry away with me recollections of social enjoyment, and of delicate attentions from you and your household" (here Mr. Meadows cast an eye on one of the footmen) "which time

can never efface. Allow me to thank you in the name of—of— ”

“ Come along, Pa, the coachman says the horses won't stand,” here put in Miss Meadows from the carriage window, for she could see the satirical smile on the footman's face, and the wink he was bestowing on a brother in plush.

As they drove through the park, Mr. Meadows, still under the genteel influences around him, talked critically of the deer and the game, and made pretence of deciding the age of a fine buck by his antlers. Of the society they had just quitted, he spoke in the easy tone of an habitu   of polite circles. “ I understand Lady S—— is going to winter in Rome. The Cardrossers are off direct to their place in the North. Charming woman, Mrs. Severn—artistic tastes, and quite a musician. Never met

a pleasanter set, taking them all round. I congratulate you, my dear Melusina, on the impression you made."

"We shall see about that when I ask them to take tickets for my concerts next season," said Miss Meadows cynically. "Folks are ready enough to listen to you and praise you as long as there's nothing to pay."

"But the payment is scarcely an object with people of that class," said the Professor. "For instance, Mrs. Severn is noted for her patronage of artists. Very desirable acquaintance to have made; always see her name as a lady patroness of the best charity concerts. Wealthy folks, too; they say her husband could be made a peer any day he chose."

"Ah—don't know," was the reply; and Miss Meadows leaned back in the

corner of the carriage, shut her eyes, and feigned sleep. She had had what she called "a tiff" with her papa that morning, and she did not mean to make matters up just yet. Finding he was not encouraged to talk, the Professor leaned back in his corner of the carriage, covered his head with his pocket-handkerchief, and soon sank into a sleep that was not feigned, for he had lunched heartily before starting. When her father began to snore, Miss Meadows opened her eyes, and, unlocking her travelling-bag, took out from it a case containing a handsome bracelet—it had been given her that morning by Mrs. Severn. Thus ran Miss Meadows' thoughts as she examined it,—

"Very pretty, and real stones; it will look uncommonly well with white or blue silk. I wonder how much she gave for it.

She is the only generous one amongst them; the others showed me lots of fine things, but never offered me anything. Oh, yes, those trumpery studs of Mrs. Whittaker's; I'm glad I said I had a pair like them, which I bought in the Lowther Arcade. If that woman asks me to sing in her house, I'll make her pay for it. I wonder how much was true of what they said about my singing. People tell such crammers when they want to be agreeable. I believe, though, one person meant all he said—that young man from the Rectory. I never thought so well of myself as when I saw him standing by the piano that day, with the tears running down his cheek. He has good eyes, I think, but I don't call him handsome—at least not quite—and he's so very young—quite a boy. But he's a nice boy, and I'm sure I don't know

what I should have done without him. He was so useful, and kept pa out of the way beautifully. What a shame of pa to borrow money of him! I wish I had seen him again, to give him the money back. He said he should call this morning to say good-bye, but he didn't. Perhaps they wouldn't let him come. I could see that old maid at the Rectory and her mother didn't like me. They were stiff as pokers when I went over to see their ugly little church and their new organ. But how well that boy played! I should like to have given him an "encore." Mr. Mott sets his face against "encores," by the way, and was quite savage when some one defended them. I know I was generally glad enough to have them when I was 'the M. M.,' and shall be again, I suppose,"—and here Miss Meadows sank into a reverie

as to that coming time of triumph—a reverie which was continued till the sudden slackening of the horses' pace caused her to look up.

They were about to ascend a long hill, and had to proceed slowly. They had not gone many yards, when there was a sound of horse's hoofs behind them, and the next minute a horseman dashed past the carriage window, reining up just in front.

"Oh, how you startled me! If it had been dark, I should have thought it was a highwayman, and expected to see a pistol in my face," said Miss Meadows, as the horseman came close up to the window.

"I have been riding hard to catch you. I thought I should do it at this hill," said the equestrian, whose cheeks glowed with

the exercise. "You had gone when I reached the Abbey, but I borrowed one of Mr. Brande's horses and followed you."

"Well, I'm sure it's very polite. I suppose you remembered you hadn't said good-bye?"

"Yes," said Gus; "and I had another reason for coming. I wanted to give you this—if—if you will accept it. Oh, it's nothing of much value."

It was a roll of manuscript music, containing some Welsh airs, which Gus had sat up the best part of the night to copy.

"There was one of them you said you would like to have, and it is not in print," said he, blushing, "so I added it to them."

"They are beautifully copied, and you must have given yourself a deal of trouble.

I'm very much obliged," and Melusina turned the full force of her large eyes on the young man. "The one I like best, you say, is not in print? Of course not. It is your own composing."

Gus blushed again, but did not deny "the soft impeachment."

"And very pretty it is," went on the lady. "You are quite a musician; and if you'll compose a song for me, words and all, I'll learn it."

"You will? Then I'm sure I'll try, though I'm a poor poet," said Gus readily.

"And what is more, I'll sing it at, my own concerts, and you shall come and clap me," said Melusina, with a smile.

"I'll do that readily enough," said he heartily. "Ah, Miss Meadows," he added, looking down at her hand which rested on

the carriage door, "you'll soon have plenty of folks to applaud you yonder in London!"

"Let's hope so," said she.

"And you won't care for my clapping then."

"Yes, I shall. Every pair of hands helps."

"But I mean they will all be the same to you—every one who sits listening to you. It will be 'the public,' and nothing more."

This was said with a melancholy air, which almost made Melusina laugh, but here the carriage having reached the hill-top, they went on faster, and conversation became more difficult. Gus kept up with them for the next two or three miles, quite satisfied to have a word from time to time with the charmer. Her father still slept, so there was all the privacy of a tête-à-tête in the interview.

“How warm your horse looks! I think you had better go no farther,” said Miss Meadows at length, for she began to think her companion would ride all the way to London if she let him. “Before you turn back, I want to give you this.” She held out five shillings. “Papa has a bad habit of borrowing money and leaving me to pay.”

“Oh, Miss Meadows, pray don’t trouble about it!” Gus answered uneasily. “Mr. Meadows will pay me some other time.”

“No, he won’t. He never does. Oh, he can’t hear, he is fast asleep. Don’t do it again, please! it’s no kindness to him, and it worries me.”

Gus felt quite distressed at the shadow that passed over Miss Meadows’ fine face as she spoke.

"Good-bye, Mr. Fairbairn," said she, putting out her hand. "I won't let you go any farther. Mind you compose some pretty verses for me, and come and hear me sing them when next you are in London."

"May I come? I mean, will you give me your address? I shall be in town at Christmas," said Gus, with sparkling eyes.

"We are just going to change our lodgings," said Miss Meadows, not caring to disclose the unfashionable quarter of the town she had lately resided in, "but if you can't find us out in any other way, apply at Sackbut and Dulcimer's, the music people in Regent Street. They'll know where to find me. Good-bye," and then Miss Meadows waved her hand, and Gus turned his horse's head and sat looking back at the carriage until it grew a speck

in the distance. When he could see them no longer, he rode on again home, but at a slower speed, and with a less bright face than he had come.

CHAPTER V.

SOME HALF-CONFIDENCES.

IT was a hard task for Gus to set himself to work again after the delightful dissipations of the last fortnight. But for the necessity of doing so, he would no doubt have taken to wandering about the spots haunted by recollections of the fair Melusina, after the manner of disconsolate lovers, and have wasted his time frightfully. But there was his examination before him, and a good friend at his side, ready to stimulate him to exertion. The only really happy moments he knew (so he thought,


however) were when he shut himself up in his own room to compose that precious song which he intended to express all the love and admiration with which his heart was overflowing.

There were visitors at the Rectory just now. Mr. and Mrs. Severn had come to spend a few days with their old friend Mr. Staynes, before leaving the neighbourhood. It was a great pleasure to the two men to renew an intercourse which had been much interrupted of late years ; and the ladies at the Rectory were delighted to entertain Mrs. Severn, " who had always been such a favourite of Hugh's when they were young folks," said old Mrs. Staynes, naïvely. Miss Phemie, who perhaps had a clearer insight into the past than her mother, was rather stately and cold with their visitor at first ; " for surely her

brother's love would have honoured any woman," reasoned the sister, and she could not quite forgive Mrs. Severn for having inspired an affection she was unable to return. But Miss Phemie soon melted; for their guest was one of those women who quickly win the regard of their own sex, and there were too many points of sympathy between the two ladies for them to remain long apart.

The events of the last few years had left marked traces upon Mrs. Severn, both physically and morally. She had lost much of her buoyancy of spirit; she had grown more delicate in appearance; but she had lost nothing of her old charm of character. After her long and severe illness, she had spent a winter in Italy, accompanied by her husband, who for a time sacrificed all his political and business projects for her

sake. There were not wanting people who saw in Mrs. Severn's changed appearance evidence that her marriage had not turned out a happy one; but such people knew as much about the true state of matters as outsiders generally do know of the true relations and inner lives of husbands and wives. Upon the death of her father (which had taken place two years ago), Mrs. Severn had inherited the whole of Sir Richard's large fortune; but her father had died without ever seeing the grandchildren on whose existence his hopes had been so set. After his wife's recovery, Mr. Severn had devoted himself to politics with even more than his former zeal, and made himself a name of mark in the land. People said he was ambitious, and the good-natured folks before mentioned affirmed that he neglected his wife,



and that he was soured by his disappointment in having no children. But Mrs. Severn was not conscious that she was a victim. She found occupations and interests enough in life, both in town and country. If there were any difference in the old relations between herself and husband, any lessening of tenderness or confidence, it was known only to themselves in their inmost hearts—felt rather than recognized even there, and never made visible to the world by word or action.

Gus was well pleased to have such an agreeable visitor in the house as Mrs. Severn, whatever his sentiments were towards her husband. In the latter's presence he was reserved, and he still retained the impression that he was a cold and proud man; but of the lady he grew fonder every day. He was delighted to

show her about the neighbourhood, to choose for her the best points for making sketches, or to play to her on the church organ. He even felt tempted to take her into his confidence on the subject of his affections; but though Mrs. Severn did justice to the musical talents of Miss Meadows, she never seemed enthusiastic about the young lady's other perfections. Gus wondered at this insensibility, but feeling that the subject was one only for sympathetic ears, he kept the state of his affections to himself. As for Miss Staynes and her mother, he considered they were utterly prejudiced and unreasonable, seeing they denied that Miss Meadows' nose was Grecian, and had insinuated that she had a Cockney accent. After that, Gus of course never mentioned the lady again in their presence.

But our young hero (who was not constructed after any heroic type, alas!) was about to have his thoughts turned into a new channel at this time. One morning, whilst he sat reading Greek under the walnut-tree at the bottom of the garden, Mr. Staynes approached, bearing in his hand two letters with the Australian post-mark.

“We have not got good news to-day, Gus,” said he gravely, handing him one of the letters. “It is Mr. Fairbairn, not your mother, who writes.”

Gus changed colour, and looking up at his tutor, stammered out,—

“You do not mean that my mother is —?” But he could not utter the word that hovered on his lips.

“No, no, not that,” said Mr. Staynes, quickly divining his meaning; “but she

is ill and in great trouble. I will leave you to read your letter;" and Mr. Staynes returned to the house.

It was not often Gus received a letter from Mr. Fairbairn, who, whilst rigorously fulfilling all duties towards him, never made any pretence of affection, nor assumed any sort of paternal attitude. The letter of to-day ran thus,—

"DEAR GUS,—Your mother is unable to write to you by this mail, being seriously ill, and not yet recovered from a severe shock she met with on our little daughter's last birthday. Lois and some young companions were having a dance, when her dress caught fire through the accidental overturning of a lamp. Her mother ran to her assistance, and succeeded in putting out the flames. The child was very little injured, but your mother was severely

burnt about the hands and face, and we have reason to fear that her sight is injured. The doctors say the worst is past, but it will be long before she gets over the shock.

“I have not time to write more. I hope you are working hard, and doing your best to satisfy your mother’s wishes. She begs me to write this, knowing you expect to hear from her this mail. In haste to catch it,

“I am, yours truly,

“ANDREW FAIRBAIRN.

“P.S.—I enclose you the unfinished letter which your mother was writing at the time when the accident took place.”

For some moments Gus felt greatly moved by this news and by the sight of the unfinished letter before him. “If his mother should never get well again! If

they were never to meet any more !” The thought was mournful enough, but it had a peculiar bitterness for him. He felt lonely enough now ; but if she were gone, there would be no one in the world on whose love he had any claim, or could count on as a right. Even his mother’s memory was less distinct than formerly ; he had not seen her for more than ten years ; and in that time the warmest affections lose something of their intensity. But when he thought of her in this affliction, his old love seemed to revive, and she was again the dear mother of his childish days.

He could work no more this morning, and, laying aside his books, he got up, and springing over the low fence that separated the garden from the glebe, wandered on to the high ground that lay above. There

was a seat placed at the highest point in the ravine, where a view of the church and valley below could be seen through the trees and brushwood. Seating himself on the bench, Gus drew out Mr. Fairbairn's letter and read it again; it seemed to him a curt and cold epistle, and conveyed somehow a feeling that he did not belong to them—that it was a sort of official announcement of a circumstance with which he was not expected to sympathize. He had never so much realized his entire separation from his mother and the present interests of her life as at this moment. And yet to-day he felt a strong yearning towards her. The tears welled up into his eyes, and he sat with his face resting on his hands, his elbows on his knees, engrossed in sad thoughts. He had been sitting thus some time, when he heard a

rustle amongst the fern fronds, and looking up, he beheld Mrs. Severn with her sketching portfolio.

“I have been looking for my guide, but I could not find you in the garden,” said she, as she approached; “I want to find a good point for getting in the church tower.”

As she spoke, Mrs. Severn remarked the tears on the young man’s cheek, and his air of dejection.

“I am afraid I disturbed you,” said she gently. “I hope you have no ill news there?” She looked at the letter he was folding up.

“Yes, I have,” said he; “some very sad news,” and he told Mrs. Severn what the letter contained.

“You must not waste too much sympathy on me, Mrs. Severn,” said he, in

reply to some kindly remark; "I was just thinking how much more keenly I should have felt this a few years ago, when my mother's memory was fresher in my mind than now. It will soon be a dozen years since I saw her. As for the little girl, she is only my half-sister, and I have never seen her." He paused and added, "But I have heard of her very often, for I think my mother never writes to me without naming her little Lois, whom she evidently worships."

"Lois, did you say?" Mrs. Severn was looking out over the landscape; she turned and faced Gus as she spoke.

"Yes; she was so called after my mother. It is a pretty name: don't you think so?"

"A very pretty name," replied Mrs. Severn; and as she spoke her cheek sud-

denly flushed. She sat down, with her head bent over her portfolio, searching for her pencils; but she was some moments before she began her sketch. Gus was too preoccupied with his own thoughts to notice Mrs. Severn's manner.

"My mother is as pretty as her name," he went on, with a grave, meditative air. "I don't remember her face so well as I used to do; but I always think it is like that face of the Mater Dolorosa in the picture that hangs in Mr. Staynes' library."

"Then it is a sweet face, but a very sad one," said Mrs. Severn, who was now engaged in her sketch.

"My mother's face is a sad one," continued Gus, "at least, I seem to remember it best with a sad look upon it. Perhaps, though, that is because when I last saw

her she was crying at parting from me." He paused a moment. "Or it may be that it was often sad when I used to look up at her as a little child," he added slowly, as though speaking to himself.

It was a proof of his liking for Mrs. Severn that he could bring himself to speak to her of his mother, and of his affection for her. Her name rarely passed his lips now. But to-day it seemed to relieve him to talk of her and of his childhood to this gentle, sympathetic lady.

"I'm afraid I was a passionate young cub, and dreadfully jealous," said he, with a rueful smile. "Do you know, Mrs. Severn, I have heard them say that I screamed until I was black in the face the first time I saw my mother with a baby in her arms; and for some days they were

afraid to let me go near the cradle, for fear I should do some injury to my little brother. But my step-father, like a sensible man, soon cured me of my tempers. Of course he was quite right to flog me ; but when I saw that it made my mother cry, I hated him."

After a pause, he went on, "She was so gentle and so pretty, you would have liked her, I am sure. She used to play with me and sing to me by the hour together. I think Mr. Fairbairn sometimes thought she wasted too much time in that way, for I remember we were playing one day on the floor together when he came in and scolded my mother—or at least said something which made the tears come, and I never remember our having any romps afterwards ; I have no doubt he was right. My mother, I dare say, was too juvenile in

her tastes for grown-up people, but to my childish thinking she was just perfect."

"As a mother should be to her son," said Mrs. Severn, "both when he is a child and when he is a man."

"Yes," said Gus slowly, "as she should be!" and, as he spoke, his face grew overcast, and he talked but little more until they returned home.

CHAPTER VI.

SOME FURTHER CONFIDENCES.

THE letter which Mr. Andrew Fairbairn had written to Mr. Staynes contained other matter of importance which was not communicated to Gus until the next day.

“I think it time that Argus should understand what is expected of him in return for the advantages I have given him,” wrote Mr. Fairbairn. “It has long been his mother’s desire that he should one day enter the Church; and it was to carry out that desire that I consented to his going to college. For my own part, I would rather he had entered a counting-house in London,

which could easily have been done through my brother's influence ; but my wife thinks differently, and sees in the clerical calling a safeguard against some of the dangers and difficulties of his exceptional position. She may be right. I wish him clearly to understand, however, that I have no intention of buying him a living, or helping him to promotion by means of money. Apart from any other objections I should have to so doing, I should consider it an injustice to my other boys, whose education has been less expensively conducted. Pray understand I do not grudge these expenses—I shall always be glad to have incurred them, provided he works hard, and carries out his mother's wishes. Of course, when he has taken his degree, he will only have a curacy to look forward to, or some employment in tuition. Let him know that

he will have to depend upon his own exertions, and convey to him (if you think well) his mother's reasons for desiring that he should be a clergyman. I enclose part of a letter which she was writing to him at the time of the accident: the rest of it was burned, but I send it as it is, for I much doubt whether my poor wife will ever see to write to him again."

Written in Mr. Andrew Fairbairn's direct, business-like hand, this letter was now lying on Mr. Staynes' desk, and its contents had just formed the subject of a long conversation between him and Gus. The latter had abruptly quitted the room a few minutes ago, leaving Mr. Staynes regarding the letter with an uneasy face.

"What say you?" he inquired of Mr. Severn, who had just entered the library, to know if his friend was ready for their

usual morning's ride. "Is it right—can it be right under any circumstances, to persuade a young man to enter a calling for which he expresses a distaste, and for which he has certainly no marked vocation?"

"That depends upon what the calling and the circumstances are, I should say," replied Mr. Severn. "Why do you put such a vague proposition?"

Mr. Staynes explained a little further the position on which the opinion was asked, without giving the circumstances in full.

"I have been trying for the last half hour," he continued, "to prove to Fairbairn that he is bound by every consideration of duty and gratitude to acquiesce in his friends' choice of a profession for him. I confess when I saw his dismay

at his step-father's ultimatum it rather went against the grain with me, and I am half disposed to call him back and eat my own words—some of them, that is."

"Better write to his friends and ask them to reconsider the matter, or to let their decision stand over until he has taken his degree," said Mr. Severn.

Mr. Staynes shook his head.

"We have gone into the question before this," said he. "Mr. Fairbairn is a man who knows his own mind, and has well considered the matter before he consented to carry out his wife's wishes."

"I suppose the mother is a bigot, and is going to sacrifice her son to some fanatical sentiment?" said Mr. Severn.

"No, I should rather say she is a pious, humble-minded woman, who has known

serious troubles in her time, and is influenced by conscientious motives in choosing this calling for her son," said Mr. Staynes slowly.

"She is making a mistake nevertheless, from what you tell me, and judging by what I myself have seen of him," replied Mr. Severn, who stood looking out on the garden. "The lad seems to have an' excess of energy and vitality which only wants well directing to be turned to good account. I was amused just now by the way in which he was chopping wood in the plantation yonder. He swung the axe with such a will that I expected to see sparks fly from the blows."

"Ah! he was letting off the steam, I expect," replied Mr. Staynes. "We have just had a very serious talk, and the pressure was high when he quitted this room ;

perhaps it is well it should find vent in some strong physical exertion." And after a pause he added, "These first struggles of youth against the fixed, unalterable conditions of life have something very pitiable in them. At our more sober age, one can hardly realize how much they suffer in kicking against the pricks,—and along some paths the thorns lie very thick."

Gus was still engaged in helping Morgan to make up the Rector's wood-pile for the winter, when the two gentlemen rode out of the grounds shortly after. By the time his fellow-labourer went away to dinner, the young man had worked himself into a prodigious heat, but he had cooled down some of the inner fever that consumed him. Left alone, he sat down to rest awhile, and to think with calmness, if he could, on the subject of the letter. But he could not

keep calm, and the old, angry feelings returned as certain passages recurred to him.

It was bad enough to be forced into a calling that was distasteful, but it was in the reasons that had influenced his friends' choice that there was the special sting. "He was to be made a sort of peace-offering for other people's sins, was he?" he asked himself indignantly. "He was to acquire from his calling that moral purification of which he stood in such need—was that it?" The blood ran hot in his veins at the thought.

"Exceptional position!" he muttered. "True enough; and so he was to be made to run in the safe ruts of the clerical career because he was a suspected person, with a moral taint upon him—a person who had more need to be kept in check than

other young men. Yes, that was what his mother's letter meant, if anything. Why else did she revert to the old topic of his miserable childhood, and their obligations to Mr. Fairbairn, who had raised them both from poverty and degradation? Why else did she speak of the joy it would be to her to know her son was resolved to devote his life to God and his fellow-men?

"Much of the burden I bear, and shall bear to my grave, would be lightened, I think, if I knew you were helping sinful men and women to lead better lives," wrote the poor mother at the moment when the pen had fallen from her hands.

That unfinished letter would have touched Gus greatly, if it had not been for the interpretation he put upon its tone of solicitude. Instead of reading it over and over again, as he once used to re-read his

mother's letters, he had already destroyed it, to get rid of the very sight of words that roused such bitter reflections.

"I suppose there is no help for it," said he, springing suddenly to his feet, with a short laugh. "It's my duty to help them to make the best of the bad bargain they've got in me—that's about it. And perhaps," he added, "the coating of clerical whitewash may prevent folks discovering the original marks of the black sheep—who knows?" and with a scornful air he seized up the bill-hook, and set to work again with his wood-cutting.

But the frown upon his face remained, and it was still there when evening came, and the family were assembled in the drawing-room. His silence and his gloomy air were too noticeable not to be remarked, and Mrs. Severn commented upon it to

Mrs. Staynes next morning as they sat at work.

“Ah! he has a deal of temper,” said the old lady, shaking her head. “He was always very excitable.”

“I should hardly have thought temper was at the bottom of his dull mood last night,” said Mrs. Severn.

“Well, I dare say he was getting over it then; but I saw him come out of the study yesterday, looking dreadfully put out. I suppose Hugh had been finding fault with his work. He went off to the plantation, and Morgan tells me he blunted a new axe by the furious way in which he began to chop wood. Well, well, we are none of us perfect, and there is more excuse for his shortcomings than for most folks!”

Here Mrs. Staynes gave a little sigh, and

her knitting-needles clicked fast for some moments.

“I really don’t know what might have become of him if he hadn’t fallen into Hugh’s hands,” resumed the old lady; “he was such a strange and passionate child! and then he had not been judiciously brought up. From the first, Hugh has had a remarkable influence over him, and though Argus is very odd, I can’t doubt his affection for my son. Indeed, as far as the poor boy was concerned, I look upon that awful shipwreck as a providential occurrence; I do, indeed, Mrs. Severn.”

The old lady made another pause, and then—for she always loved to tell the story of that terrible winter’s night—proceeded to relate how her son had brought the little shipwrecked stranger into the house in his

arms, "looking white as a sheet, and with a dreadful wound on his dear little forehead;" and, as usual, the old lady shed tears at this point of her story. Being a loquacious old lady, and having a listener who seemed much interested in her narration, Mrs. Staynes related other things than these—things which, she felt compelled to warn her hearer, were told in strictest confidence, "and which I would not, of course, name to any one but you, my dear Mrs. Severn," added the old lady rather anxiously, when she began to be afraid she had been too communicative.

Whatever the nature of these confidences, Mrs. Severn kept them to herself as requested. That they did not prejudice her against young Fairbairn, was to be inferred from the fact that a few days later

she acquiesced in her husband's suggestion that he should be included in an invitation to Severn Hill, which was given to the Rector and his family before they quitted Llantgarvon.

END OF BOOK THE FOURTH.



BOOK THE FIFTH.

THE WHIRLIGIG OF TIME.



CHAPTER I.

IN TYBURNIA CRESCENT.

IT was the spring-time of the year 1851, a season of memorable hopes at that date, of memorable recollections to-day. London was making ready for the reception of those guests of All Nations on whose fraternal tendencies such pleasing though fallacious expectations were based. All quarters of the town exhibited signs of activity, especially those quarters connected with fashion and amusement. Theatre managers, concert-givers, artists of all sorts were on the alert. More

people than Miss Meadows thought they were about to make their fortunes at this juncture; more people than she were disappointed. Not that Miss Meadows was without her share of successes at the present moment. She had not yet been engaged to sing at a state concert at Buckingham Palace; but she had sung at a city company's dinner, and, what was more, had received a five guinea fee. She had not yet trodden the boards of the Royal Italian Opera, but she had got an encore at Madame Tuttifanti's *Matinée* at Willis's Rooms, and incurred the lasting enmity of the fair concert-giver by carrying off the honours of the day. In short, things were looking up with Miss Meadows; and though those visions of enraptured audiences showering bouquets upon her whilst she curtsied low before

the foot-lamps seemed slow to realize themselves, that period of discouragement she had passed through on arriving in the metropolis seemed drawing to a close.

“But goodness knows,” as Miss Meadows has just indignantly observed, “that it’s no easy matter to make both ends meet with a large West-end house on your shoulders, and a pa who really is not fit to be trusted with the keys for five minutes.”

The West-end house is situated in a crescent abutting on a fashionable square, and was described by the house agent who had let it as “a genteel corner residence, well adapted for sub-letting as first-class apartments, suitable for the requirements of a member of parliament, or a family of distinction attending town for the season.” Miss Meadows required such a house, and

took it. That she was in a position to do so, and to satisfy the agent's inquiries, was owing to the opportune death of a maiden aunt, who had left her 700*l.* a few months ago, with a request that not a penny of it might go into her father's pocket. This lady, Miss Jane Crummer by name, had kept a stationer's shop at Islington, and had quarrelled violently with her sister at the time she married "that fool Meadows, the fiddler."

Mr. Meadows always hinted that "the anger of spurned beauty" was at the bottom of his sister-in-law's opposition to the marriage, but he would not have dared to whisper the insinuation within the hearing of Miss Crummer, for that lady, though small of stature, was wiry and of a fiery spirit, and at their last interview had chased him out of the shop with a

sweeping broom, and defied him to cross her threshold again. Miss Crummer had small respect for the arts cultivated by Mr. Meadows, but she had a great respect for honesty, and "liked people to pay their bills before they decked themselves out in eye-glasses and satin waistcoats, and talked about their fantasias and fiddlesticks," as she candidly informed the customers present on the occasion of the Professor's ignominious exit from the shop.

Partly to carry out her aunt's wishes with regard to the aforesaid legacy, and partly because her own professional position required that she should reside in a western quarter of the town, Miss Meadows had taken this "genteel corner residence," and it was in the dining-room thereof, a large but unsymmetrical apartment, and like the rest of the house all

askew by reason of its corner position, it was here that Miss Meadows had just made the observation about her papa, and his untrustworthiness with regard to the keys. The remark was addressed to a gentleman with a dark complexion and a beard who sat lolling back on the sofa, regarding Miss Meadows as she re-trimmed an evening dress, unmindful of the male eyes that watched her.

"It was a spotless white in its youth," said the lady, pointing to the robe; "then it was trimmed with pink; then it came out in maize-colour, with scarlet poppies; and now in its old age it is going to be blue. What's that you say? 'Their wearers often take that hue as they get older'? Keep your puns for your dinner-parties and clubs, Mr. Brande: I hate them, and don't generally understand them either."

"I don't think you have much sense of humour," was the reply, uttered in a leisurely, critical way.

"I suppose you're going to throw *that* at me now, as you once threw my 'false style' at me. I declare you've come back from Jericho, or wherever it is you've been, as horrid and disagreeable as you went."

Mr. Brande had spent the preceding winter in the East, and he had been relating some of his adventures to Miss Meadows. Perhaps it was her lack of appreciation of the humorous incidents of travel that had caused him to make the remark.

"Ah! but the style was cultivable, the faculty of humour isn't, I'm afraid," went on Mr. Brande, with a provoking shake of the head. "You can smile archly, of course, when you sing comic

songs, but the mirth is as artificial as that rosebud."

"I don't ever sing comic songs, sir. I wish those Druses, or Bedouins, or whatever they were, who took you prisoner out yonder, had kept you there, or taught you manners before they set you free."

"You want me to flatter you, Miss Meadows, and say you didn't get flat before you had finished your duet last Tuesday night, is that it?"

"Who wouldn't get flat, I wonder, when a person you believe to be lying in a dungeon loaded with chains, thousands of miles away, comes and plants himself in the doorway of a concert-room and stares at you through an opera-glass whilst you are singing? It was too bad!"

"How could I announce myself? I had only been a couple of hours in

London. It was your name on the bills outside the concert-room door that caused me to stop the cab, as I drove by, and look in. What a professional air you have got, and how majestically you have learned to curtsy to the public ! ”

“What other faults have you to find ? My curtseys, my smile, my voice, all sneered at, I see.”

“No ; I am praising you in good faith. You are getting on famously. I saw your name in two announcements in the *Times* this morning. Why, you must be singing in public almost every day ! ”

Miss Meadows shook her head.

“Doesn’t pay ; have to give one’s services mostly. It’s always either the Distressed Somebody’s Fund, or the Benefit of ‘that favourite artiste,’ who looks so savagely at you if you haven’t got on a new

dress for her glorification. ‘Give me a good teaching-connexion, and you may take all the concerts,’ said old Miss Bassoon to me at her farewell *Matinée*, and she knows the profession well, having been in it this half century, and made her fortune too. But I hate teaching, and I wouldn’t give a single lesson unless I was forced.”

It must be allowed that for an aspirant to the honours of the lyrical stage, lesson-giving was rather a descent; but there seemed small prospect of the doors of either of the great opera-houses opening to Miss Meadows, even under the influence of powerful people like Mr. Brande.

“I’m sure I wish the M.P. would make haste and come,” went on the lady, as she stitched away. “I never hear a double knock at the door without thinking, ‘Ah, there he is at last!’”

“ ‘The M.P. ’ ? ” repeated Mr. Brande inquiringly.

“ Yes ; the one promised with the house. He would be a deal nicer than the ‘ family of distinction in town for the season. ’ I know I should have words with the ladies of *that* party ; and I have a feeling that it would take place on the staircase. ”

“ Why there ? ” laughed Mr. Brande.

“ Because they would want to take all the room, and I shouldn’t let them ; and then they would look at me through their eye-glasses, and I should stare again ; and then—in short, there would be ‘ words. ’ But however irritating those women may be, I am resolved on one thing, Mr. Brande. I don’t mean under any provocation to say that ‘ I have never been accustomed to let apartments before ’ (though it would be strictly true), and

there shall be no cat kept in this establishment, no matter how tempting the cookery may be, nor how small their appetites."

"Your sentiments do you credit, I am sure," laughed Mr. Brande. "I should think the cellar question will be your gravest difficulty."

"Yes; it's the keys—the *keys* that prey upon my mind!" cried Miss Meadows, with an air of comical despair. "Pa is behaving beautifully just now; but I know he can't resist visiting the sideboard when my back is turned. Only this very morning I heard through those folding-doors the jingle of a decanter all the time I was talking to some people who had come about the apartments; and it was as much as I could do to avoid screaming out, 'Pa, put that bottle back this moment!' which you will own was a trying feeling to have to over-

come, when talking to a colonel and his wife of the genteelest description."

"I suppose there is somebody after the apartments now?" said Mr. Brande, as there came a sound of wheels outside, and a loud rap at the hall door.

Miss Meadows peered over the blind.

"Yes; a carriage and pair, and servants in livery. Two ladies; one young and rather pretty, the other staring suspiciously at the house, and has already got a bargaining expression on her face. Please wait till I come back;" and Miss Meadows hastened off to the drawing-room.

After a time, Mr. Brande heard the carriage drive away, and Miss Meadows returned.

"Now, will you believe it; that horrid woman has kept me all this time, and asked me all her impertinent questions, and then

has the coolness to say that it is for friends who are coming over in the course of the summer from New Zealand (or somewhere millions of miles away) to see the Exhibition, and that she will write or call again if the rooms are wanted; but she fears the house will be 'too noisy,' that meant my singing, of course. You should have heard her say, 'Oh, indeed! you're professional, are you?' as though I had said I had got the small-pox."

Miss Meadows tossed aside the lady's card she held in her hand, and sat down again to her work.

"Why, her name is Fairbairn!" exclaimed Mr. Brande, who had picked up the card; 'Mrs. Luke Fairbairn, Perth Lodge.'"

"I am sure I never noticed—I was too vexed with the woman. Fairbairn? Why,

that was the name of my young admirer down at your place in Wales."

"Of course it is; and this is one of his London relatives, I should not wonder."

"Ah—hem!" Miss Meadows made a little pause. "Now I'm disappointed in him. I thought *he* had been one of the faithful sort. But, lor, men are all the same—old and young; their vanity makes them fancy themselves in love with any woman who says a kind word to them."

"Fairbairn was in love, then, with you, was he?"

"Calf-love: but he was a very nice young fellow, and I did not think he would have deserted me so soon. I have never seen or heard of him since."

"I dare say it is not his own fault," said Mr. Brande. "He is going to be a parson,

and his friends are keeping him hard at work."

"A parson? Lor, how queer!" laughed Miss Meadows; "the last thing I should have thought he would have chosen."

"He didn't choose, I expect; his friends did for him. I believe if I had encouraged him, he would have gone out to the East with me last autumn in search of work, and to escape the surplice and bands."

"Poor fellow! Why didn't you encourage him, then? He would, perhaps, have made a fortune out there, and then he could have come back and married me, and lived happily ever after," said Miss Meadows mirthfully.

"Ah! that's all very well, but—"

"But what?" Miss Meadows looked up as the speaker paused.

"But you see *his* happiness isn't my first

consideration.” Mr. Brande laid such a marked stress on the pronoun that Miss Meadows would have blushed a little if she could have done so ; but her pulses were far too calm and temperate to quicken except under the strongest emotions. “Other folks may have an interest in keeping you single,” continued Mr. Brande, “or, at least, not want to see you throw yourself away on a beardless youth.”

“Oh, fie ! I shall think you’re jealous next,” laughed Melusina. “Remember everybody doesn’t admire your fine Eastern beard : I’m sure he has sweet little whiskers.”

“He’s too good a fellow, at any rate, to be made a fool of,” said Mr. Brande ; “and if you come across him again, I hope you’ll not trifle with the poor lad.”

“Don’t speak in that horrid manner.

One would think I was a dreadful, dangerous creature, wanting to entrap a young man of fortune into matrimony."

"It would be a losing game to play in this case," said Mr. Brande. "Fairbairn isn't a young man of fortune. Though he has rich relatives, I believe he has precious little money of his own."

"Oh, indeed!" said Miss Meadows; "I wasn't aware of it."

She spoke nonchalantly enough, but she was silent for some moments, and when they resumed conversation it was to talk of other things.

CHAPTER II.

QUASI RELATIVES.

AS Mr. Brande had conjectured, it was through no fault of his own that Argus Fairbairn had not seen anything more of Miss Meadows since that day when they parted on a high-road in Wales. On the contrary, the young man regarded it as a grievance that the interposition of third parties had hitherto frustrated his intention of renewing the acquaintance. The discovery amongst his pupil's translations from Euripides of a certain poetical effusion, addressed "To a Lady Singing," and

of an acrostic on the word "Melusina," had led Mr. Staynes to defer the projected visit to London at Christmas ; for though not inclined to attach much importance to the discovery himself, the ladies of his household assured him that Gus was desperately in love with Miss Meadows, and that the housemaid regularly swept up several sheets of torn paper every morning, covered with amatory verses, and that his candle was generally found burnt down to the socket.

"It is a youth's fancy, and will soon pass," thought Mr. Staynes, "but it may be as well to keep him out of harm's way for the present."

So instead of visiting the metropolis, Argus had spent a rather dull vacation at Llantgarvon, where he found plenty of opportunity for indulging in those misan-


thropic and somewhat morbid trains of thought that were fast becoming habitual with him.

“I can’t help envying you, Ned, with your drilling and parading, and riding and dancing,” he wrote to his friend Bannister, now an ensign with his regiment; “and I can’t help feeling that such a life would be a hundred times more in my line than reading to old women and visiting sick folks. But there! beggars can’t be choosers; and I should be a beggar (yes, actually and truly, I assure you) if I refused to carry out the plans my friends have formed for me.”

This sense of dissatisfaction was none the less keen from its being henceforth concealed, as far as was possible, from those around him. After that conversation with Mr. Staynes on the subject of

his future profession, he resolved (though not convinced by the arguments he had heard) to acquiesce in the wishes of his friends, and at least give his tutor no more trouble about the matter. But in thus stifling honest convictions, he was doing an injury to his moral sense, and yielding to the dangerous doesn't-much-matter view of life.

To indemnify himself for all present and future restrictions on his conduct, he determined to enter freely into such pleasures as came in his way, whilst he had the chance; and when, in the following spring, his friend Bannister asked him to spend his Easter vacation in town, he was in the mood to enjoy himself without stint. There was so much to see the first few days, and Bannister introduced him to such a pleasant set, that he had not



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a moment's leisure. As soon as he could get a morning to himself, he resolved to try and discover Miss Meadows' whereabouts. But his application to the music-shops turned out unsuccessful. Either they did not know the lady's private address, or they hesitated to give it to a fashionably-dressed young fellow who had no connexion with the profession. There was Mr. Brande to apply to, if in town, and Bannister offered to accompany him when he heard where he was going, saying "he would like to see that odd fish again who had been so kind to them as school-boys." Gus could not decline his company, though he would willingly have done so; but on arriving at Mr. Brande's town house, they found he had gone for a few days to his place in Yorkshire.

"There is a fatality in these obstacles

to our meeting," reflected Gus disconsolately, as they turned away ; but he forbore to open his lips on the subject to his friend, who had just made the discovery that they were in the neighbourhood of the Severns' residence, and proposed they should call there.

The successful politician had been created a Baronet by a Government which had profited largely by his services. The offer had been declined more than once, it was said ; and it was possibly true, as Sir William Severn had no son to succeed to his honours.

The two young men had reached Palace Terrace, where they found Lady Severn just stepping into her carriage for a drive.

"I did not know you were in town, Mr. Fairbairn," said she, turning to Gus, after a few words with Bannister ; "you must

come and see us before you leave. As for you," she added, addressing the ensign, "I shall of course expect you at all my dances, now your regiment has come to Windsor."

There was the same gracious kindness in the lady's greeting as of old ; but there was a slight constraint, or nervousness it might have been, in her manner when she spoke to Gus, and most of her conversation was addressed to his companion. Before driving off, Lady Severn invited both of them to her next evening party, a few nights later on.

"A charming woman, isn't she ? That's the sort !" said Bannister, as they walked down the street. "Folks say she is awfully clever, and reads up blue books and despatches and that sort of thing, to prime her husband before he makes one

of his crack speeches in the House; but nobody would think it to see her so nice and simple, would they?"

Gus fully concurred, and said he had met with kindnesses from Lady Severn which he could never forget.

"When I was staying at Severn Hill last autumn," he continued, "I talked over things freely with her, and told her all about my distaste for the Church; for she has the nicest way of drawing a fellow out and making him feel at home in conversation. Finding I was pretty firm, she took the trouble to communicate with my friends on the subject, and even paid a visit to Perth Lodge, I believe, to try and get them to alter their plans."

"She did? Well, then, she is a brick! and if she wants me, I'll go to every one of her parties, even at the risk of meeting all

the cleverest people in London. Talking of Perth Lodge, when do you mean to keep your promise?"

"What promise?"

"To introduce me to 'Fanny.'"

"Fanny?" repeated Gus.

"Yes; the young lady to whom you used to send those lovely valentines," laughed Bannister, "and whose real name you kept a secret from me, till one day I found it out, and changed 'Carry' into 'Carrotty,' throughout one of your love-letters. You went into an awful rage, and challenged me on the spot. We fought in the coach-house, after dinner, the gardener's lad looking on with the keenest delight, I recollect."

"I have a good mind to tell Miss Fairbairn how witty you were at her expense when I do introduce you," laughed Gus.

"Come down with me to-day, if you like; I shall be glad to have a backer."

"Why, you are not going to fight that male cousin, Tony—Tony Lumpkin, as we used to call him?"

"Let us hope we shall not come to blows, but it will be our first meeting for some years, and we did not part on the best terms. We will get a Hansom and start at once if you like."

They did so; and in a couple of hours had reached the trim lawns and umbrageous elms of Perth Lodge. They were ushered into a great drawing-room, where a young lady sat playing the piano. She rose immediately, and was making a very correct little salutation to the visitors, when she exclaimed, with quite a start,—

"Oh, Gus, it's you! How—how altered you are! I am very glad to see you!"

and then in the frankest manner, and with the prettiest blush, she advanced and held out her hand.

“Uncle Anthony said you would be in town at Easter, but I did not know you had come yet,” she went on, after she had been introduced to the ensign.

“He did not tell you, then, that I called on him the other day in St. Botolph’s Court?” asked Gus.

“No,” replied the young lady, with a little embarrassment, for she noticed the speaker’s tone of surprise; “they never tell us anything, you know, that happens in the city. Everything there is supposed to be much too grave and important for ladies’ ears. Do sit down. I am so glad you have called!”

This unaffected cordiality was delightful. Miss Fairbairn, now a grown-up young lady, with manners and a carriage that did

infinite credit to her instructresses (the very first, both native and foreign, that money could procure), was really pleased to see her cousin again; and though they had grown to be man and woman since last they met, she did not feel in the least shy with her old companion. An observer, however, might have detected signs of embarrassment in the behaviour of Gus.

Yonder, below the lawn, was the boat-house where he had quarrelled with Anthony. On that slope behind the lake stood the plantation where he had sought refuge in anguish of spirit, and lain for hours on the ground, recalling the monstrous story his cousin had told him, and feeling at moments as if he would like to go back and kill him. In the room adjoining the one where he now sat, he had learned from the calm lips of Uncle Anthony

that the monstrous story was true. No wonder the young man felt ill at ease with such recollections crowding on his mind. Nô wonder he had hitherto shrunk from revisiting the place where the cloud that now overhung his life had first cast its shadow around him.

Miss Fairbairn continued to talk, not unobservant of her cousin's grave looks.

"I am so sorry mamma is out! She has gone to pay some visits," said she. "Did you know that Anthony has just returned from Hamburg, where he has been learning German and the foreign trade in Uncle Donald's counting-house?"

She coloured slightly as she spoke of her brother, knowing well enough why Gus had never been to visit them again.

"I am very glad to have him back again," she went on rather quickly; "it

is so pleasant to have some one to take me out!" and the young lady adroitly contrived to say as many good words as possible for her brother in the shortest space of time.

He entered before many minutes, and his behaviour certainly justified some of his sister's commendations. Whatever his present feelings towards Argus might be, Anthony Fairbairn had at least the tact and good sense to behave in a polite and friendly way. He was startled, on entering the room, to find Gus there; but, taking the bull by the horns, he went up to him, and holding out his hand, told him he was glad to see him.

"Fairbairn is certainly a good hater," thought Bannister to himself, as he saw the cold way in which the offered hand was taken.

Miss Fairbairn, too, noticed it, and

plunged into conversation with the ensign, to draw away attention from folks in such a critical position. Anthony showed his self-control by taking no notice of the slight, and continuing to converse with Argus.

“Would you like to look round the grounds, and see my new fernery?” asked Miss Fairbairn after a time.

They went out, and Ensign Bannister was shown all the prettiest points in the grounds by his fair companion, who took him in charge in order that her brother and Argus might be compelled to keep together awhile. Bannister, though generally loquacious enough in the presence of young ladies, was unusually quiet to-day. Perhaps this was not quite the “Fanny” he had in his mind’s eye coming along.

“When I see that boat-house again,”

said Gus to Anthony, as they followed in the rear, "I remember that I am indebted to you for breaking up a fool's paradise and teaching me some bitter but necessary truths."

Anthony turned red, and looking vexed, replied, "You don't mean, then, to forget that affair? If you had given me time, I wanted to tell you that I was sorry—"

"Oh, don't say a word! I mean what I say. You did me a service, and were franker than my other friends."

But Anthony's ear could detect the irony of that tone, and he felt that the speaker despised him in his heart. Though not a person of acute sensibility, Anthony was hurt and offended. He was now a grave-looking young man, with something half-Scotch, half-German about him, both in looks and manners. He had intended to

make the amende by a cordial reception of Argus, but, being rebuffed, he resolved to trouble himself no more about him.

Ere they had made the tour of the grounds Mrs. Fairbairn returned and joined them. She greeted Gus with the old air of perfunctory civility, but towards his companion she was quite cordial when she learned his name.

"I once saw your father's place in Gloucestershire when I was a girl," said she. "There was a very fine avenue of chestnuts, I remember. Is it still standing, Mr. Bannister?"

"And so you are going to be a clergyman?" said Carry to Gus, as the others went on in advance, and for the first time they found themselves alone. "I am so glad!"

"I believe it is the most popular pro-

fession with ladies," said he, in a dry voice.

She looked at him with a little surprise. "Don't you wish to go into the Church?" she asked.

"My wishes don't count for much in the matter," said he. "It was all planned and settled by other people, Carry—I beg your pardon—I ought to say Miss Fairbairn, now-a-days."

"Oh, pray don't be formal, Gus! Call me as you always used. But I thought it was your own choice. To allow yourself to be made a clergyman against your wish seems to me very wrong. I should think ill of any man who took such an office unwillingly."

"In a general way, you would be right, no doubt," said Gus, after a pause. "But my circumstances are different to those of most men."

And then, feeling he could not discuss the subject with any freedom with his companion, he broke into another topic, and they soon after rejoined the party in advance.

“That is the nicest girl I have seen for many a day!” said Bannister enthusiastically, as the young men drove back to town. “I understand now why you’ve always shirked introducing me here before. By Jove, Fairbairn, you’re a lucky fellow, to be in the good graces of such a sweet little cousin!”

“She is the only one of her name in whose good graces I have any place, that’s certain,” replied Argus, with some asperity. “There’s little love lost between me and the Clan Fairbairn, I can tell you, Bannister.”

CHAPTER III.

ENSLAVED.

IT was ten o'clock, and the carriages were setting down fast in Palace Terrace, Belgravia. It was a wet evening, and the progress of the line was impeded by the weather, which necessitated an awning stretched across the pavement, to protect Beauty alighting from her coach. Two young men in a hansom, who had been blocked for some minutes, and were getting impatient, were about to make their way to the doors of the mansion on foot, when an altercation between the police and the

driver of a hack brougham, who had tried to cut in before his time and break the rank, attracted their attention. A lady put her head out of the carriage-window and haughtily ordered the driver to proceed, which, being drunk, he did. Then growing frightened by the row that ensued, the lady begged to be allowed to get out. At the sound of her voice one of the gentlemen sprang from the cab and dashed into the road, greatly to his companion's surprise. Argus Fairbairn would have dashed into fire or water to aid the owner of that voice in a moment of distress.

"I am very glad I was at hand," said he, when ultimately the lady had been rescued from her difficulties and landed in the hall, and the drunken driver handed over to the police.

"Yes, it was most fortunate ; I was get-

ting so frightened. I should have quite spoiled my dress if I had jumped out. I never thought it was you, though; how funny, isn't it?" The lady laughed, and, after a few more words, passed up the great staircase, already thronged with the guests of Sir William and Lady Severn.

"Who is she?" asked Bannister, when he rejoined his friend in the tea-room.

"A lady I met down at Llantgarvon last year," was the reply.

"Rather odd her coming alone, eh?" asked Bannister. "I seem to know her face."

"Possibly you may. She is a celebrated singer, and has the most glorious voice you ever heard."

To Gus's mind Miss Meadows' celebrity was an actual not a presumptive fact; and the lady's talents went some way to justify

the assumption that if not already celebrated, she might ultimately become so. The guests who filled Lady Severn's saloons to-night were accustomed to hearing the best singers in Europe, and were by no means easy to please, but they found no fault with Miss Meadows' singing, which for fashionable connoisseurs is saying a deal. There were other professionals present, people who had already made their reputations. A great harpist, a celebrated violin-player, a popular tenor; for when Lady Severn provided music for her friends it was always of the best quality; and Sontag and Lablache had sung at her house before now.

"Don't you know her?" asked the harpist of the tenor. "Daughter of that old scamp, Alfred Meadows, who went about the country with an enter-

tainment when he had ruined his connexion in town, and brought out the girl as the Malibran in Miniature. Not miniature size now, is she?"

"No; rather full-blown," said the tenor, who looked as if he had detected half-a-dozen false notes, but charity forbade him disclosing them.

The "professionals" occupied one end of the room, where an alcove and a raised platform for the piano made for them a place apart. Gus had no opportunity of approaching Miss Meadows again, though his attention was concentrated in that direction all the evening. He felt indignant that she should be there simply to amuse a crowd of fine folks, "of whom one half cared nothing for music, and the other half were so fastidious that they would have criticized the singing of the very Seraphim

on high," he murmured to himself. He was standing amongst the throng near the doors of an inner drawing-room, with the last notes of Miss Meadows' song still vibrating in his ear, when he was touched on the arm by his host, whom he had not yet seen.

"I think, Mr. Fairbairn, I promised you orders for the strangers' gallery when you came to town," said Sir William Severn. "What night would you like them for?"

Gus thanked him, and named a night.

"You couldn't do better. A colonial question comes on that night; and as an Australian you will no doubt feel interested in a matter connected with our trade with your native land."

"I can hardly be said to have a native land," said Gus, with a smile, "seeing I was born at sea; but I shall like to be there that night."

It was not usual for Sir William Severn to take the trouble to offer orders for the House of Commons to young gentlemen. It was not usual for him to devote many minutes at his wife's receptions to any one guest, except such guest held high place in the political or social world, for Sir William was a grave, business-like man, whose moments were too valuable to be thrown away in frivolous chats with nobodies. Gus scarcely appreciated the compliment that was being paid him when, the talk having turned upon Oxford, his host took him into his library, and showed him a little volume containing the prize poem he had written five and twenty years ago, and which had made some stir in the University at the time.

"I used to fancy in those days I was a true son of the Muses, and going to turn

out a poet," said Sir William. "I did not know that in facts and figures, not in rhymes and metaphors, lay my forte."

"Perhaps you have changed since then, and the Muses have not had a chance?" said Argus.

"Yes; I have changed since then," said Sir William. "I retain one thing, however—my old affection for Oxford and her sons. Take the book with you, if you like."

The volume contained, besides the prize poem, several sonnets and minor poems which Sir William had thought very fine in their time, and for which he had yet a lingering fondness. The book had been brought out during that long winter when he was lame, and the revising the proofs had been a pleasant labour whilst imprisoned in his chamber.

"I didn't think you cared for this sort of thing, Sir William. I shall read it with much pleasure," said Gus, with more cordiality than was usual towards the person he addressed. "I have tried my hand at poetry a little myself," he continued; "but Mr. Staynes laughs unmercifully at my effusions."

"Ah! he was always my severest critic, years ago," said Sir William, as they returned to the reception-rooms.

It could scarcely have been as an Oxford undergraduate alone that Gus excited the interest he had inspired in Sir William Severn; more probably it was owing to something in the young man's character, or in the outline of his history as related by Mr. Staynes; possibly there was some more subtle cause for it. They saw no more of each other that night. On return-

ing to the saloon Gus's attention was taken up in trying to get a word with Miss Meadows before she left. He probably would not have succeeded if the lady had not needed his services.

"What am I to do? My carriage was taken into custody," said she, laughing, when he had worked his way to her side. "Isn't it a cruel position for a lady?"

"Oh, pray let me arrange for you!" said Gus quickly; "I will manage all right, if you will leave it to me." And he did manage, and so well that Miss Meadows was conveyed home in a fly, and had nothing to pay for it, her faithful squire feeling amply repaid by finding out her address, and getting permission to call upon her.

It was a sad rebuff to Gus next day to be met by a cold "not at home," when he

presented himself in Tyburnia Crescent, for he could hear Miss Meadows' voice pealing out the notes of the great scena from "Oberon." He consoled himself by the reflection that she must, of course, devote herself to her art. On two subsequent occasions he was not more fortunate, and the page who opened the door (Miss Meadows had started a page, who would have been an ornament to the establishment if he had not outgrown his clothes already) grinned as he repeated the formula a third time.

"Rupert, tell the gentleman," cried a pompous voice from the end of the hall, "tell the gentleman the drawing-room apartments were let this morning, and that the resident family retain the rest of the house for their own use," and Mr. Meadows, attired in a flowered dressing-gown, with

the *Morning Post* in one hand and his double eye-glass in the other, came forward. "Ah! beg your pardon; sorry I can't ask you in. My daughter is rehearsing with Signor Tromboni. Very much engaged at present."

Gus was quite taken aback by these grand manners and the formality of Mr. Meadows' address. Was this the struggling man of genius who had borrowed five shillings of him, and counted him his benefactor? His dressing-gown was lined with silk, a ring sparkled on his finger (what should Gus know of Burlington Arcade jewellery?), he was dwelling in a handsome house, and he owned a page. Mr. Meadows was now playing the role of *père d'artiste* on a superior scale. Perhaps some rumour that Mr. Fairbairn was not the young man of means he had taken him to be on a first

acquaintance also helped to account for this lack of cordiality. Anyway, Gus felt conscious of it, and rather offended by it; "Though I've no reason to suppose I am anything more than an ordinary acquaintance in their eyes," he reflected, even whilst he stood there at the door. "I shall only be a few more days in town," said he, stepping inside. "I should like to have seen Miss Meadows and given her this. It is the song I had her permission to compose for her. Perhaps you will give it to her?"

"With all the pleasure in the world, my dear sir; though whether she will be able to sing it, I won't engage to say. Two compositions dedicated to her last week; already given offence in a high quarter—a fashionable amateur—by preferring singing Rossini's music in public

to his. Not singular though, is it? Ha, ha!"

"I don't care a rap whether she sings it in public or not, if she only likes it, and will some day sing it to me," said Gus; and turning very red as he spoke, he lifted his hat and walked away.

It was a delightful surprise, after this, to receive a few hours later the following note on pink paper, written in that wonderful, dashing scrawl which so clearly betokens genius (or a defective education), and which has always the advantage of leaving one's orthography in doubt:—

"DEAR MR. FAIRBAIRN,—It is a lovely song, and I am so much obliged. So sorry I was not at home when you called; but if you will come on this evening at seven I shall have a little time

to spare before I go to the Hanover Square Rooms, and I will sing to you your pretty song, for which beleeve me,

“ Yours gratefully,

“ MELUSINA MEADOWS.”

What mattered it that there were two mistakes in spelling in this short epistle? It was a delicious note, and set Gus Fairbairn's heart beating high.

“ How kind of her! How ungenerous he had been to imagine that she was cutting him!”

All day he walked on air, and at seven o'clock presented himself at Miss Meadows' door, carrying with him the choicest bouquet Covent Garden could produce.

“ This *is* kind!” said Melusina, as she sniffed the lovely flowers. “ I'm afraid you have been very extravagant.”

Miss Meadows looked so bewitching, attired in evening dress for the concert, and she spoke so graciously as she fixed her large eyes on Gus, that he felt the bouquet would have been cheap at any price.

“I shall keep it in my hand whilst I sing, and all the other ladies will be so jealous of me!” said the fair artiste, smiling. And then she sat down to the piano and sang to Gus his own song, and in a way that thrilled him through and through. After that she sang the song she was going to sing in public that night, and asked Gus’s advice as to what she should choose if she got an encore, in the most charming and confidential way; and in the intervals between her singing she took up her bouquet and admired it afresh, declaring he must have known the very colour of her dress, “it went with it so perfectly.”

In short she behaved like a lively young woman who knows that she is becomingly dressed, is looking her very best, and is gazed upon by a pair of admiring eyes of the other sex.

“I wonder now how long my pa means to keep me waiting?” she said, when the fly was announced. “Of course I must have somebody to go with me for propriety’s sake; but really he is only a worry, and offends the other artistes by blowing my trumpet in everybody’s hearing. Will you assist me with this?” Gus quite trembled with delight as he helped Miss Meadows to put on her opera-cloak. “Oh, mind my hair!” she cried. And then when he had skilfully placed the cloak around her without disarranging her coiffure, she turned round and said, “Thanks, that’s quite clever. How do I look?”

"You look very beautiful!" said Gus, and with evident sincerity.

"That's nice of you," said she, as she viewed herself in the glass. "I like to please, in fact one is bound to please in my position. "Where's my music, and my lovely bouquet? There now, I'm armed for the contest."

She looked like a Venus Victrix, in Gus's eyes, equal to the conquest of gods or men.

"Oh, that pa of mine! If he doesn't come soon I must go without him," exclaimed Miss Meadows, tapping her fan impatiently. "I shall be late."

"Will you allow me to escort you?" asked Gus.

"*You!* What would they think of me to be chaperoned by a handsome young man?" said she laughingly.

Gus blushed, but laughed also.

"We can pass you in," said Miss Meadows; "but you mustn't come near me, nor look as if you had the most distant acquaintance with me in private when you applaud me; mind that. Ah! here comes my provoking parent at last."

Gus had the felicity of handing Miss Meadows to the "Broom," as her papa styled it, and then he followed them to Hanover Square as quickly as a cab could take him.

The concert was a perfect success to his thinking, for Miss Meadows sang her best, was liberally applauded, and when she curtseyed her acknowledgments to the public, she pressed the bouquet he had given her to her heart, and he could almost fancy that her glance turned momentarily in his direction. But the

climax of his happiness was still to come.

He was invited to return home to supper with them, and offered a seat in their fly. Miss Meadows was in high spirits, and talked and laughed all the way home, and looked so handsome as she sat at supper in her fine attire that Gus was more captivated than ever. There were cutlets and kidneys and mashed potatoes, and bottled stout, and Miss Meadows did justice to them all, declaring that "singing always made her so hungry." And her papa, under these genial influences, grew cordial and conversational as of old, and brought out his best anecdotes of the musical and theatrical world of thirty years before, and assured Mr. Fairbairn that he should always grudge the National Established Church the pos-

session of a nature so artistic as his, and gifted with such fine musical abilities.

“Cultivate your voice, sir, cultivate your voice. We may yet, Melusina, have the pleasure of seeing our friend here on the clerical staff of one of our great Cathedrals, eh?”

“Ah, wouldn’t it be nice, pa, to stay at the Reverend Argus Fairbairn’s in the ‘minster precincts,’ when he is Canon of somewhere or other, as Jenny Lind and Clara Novello and those great swells do! Do try and get appointed to a cathedral, Mr. Fairbairn.”

She smiled at him so sweetly as she spoke that Gus felt as if no object of human ambition could be beyond his attainment, if only Melusina’s approval spurred him on.

“You overrate my powers, I fear; but you put the future in a more agreeable

light than I have viewed it before," said he, wondering whether such union of the art he loved with the profession he was destined for was a thing possible in his case.

The clock struck twelve, and he rose to go, in the middle of an interesting discussion on church music (for however ill informed on other subjects, the Meadowses were both well up in most matters relating to their art), and Melusina, putting out her hand said,—

"Good-bye. I mean what I say about your song. It is lovely! and I believe it would 'take' in public. I'll try it one of these days."

"I would rather," said Gus, in a low tone, "I would rather you kept it to sing to—to those who appreciate and care for you," and he blushed violently as he spoke.

“Oh, dear, that’s selfish, I’m afraid !
We’ll see about it.”

Miss Meadows gave an arch little nod, and then, as all this time her father was standing waiting at the hall door, Gus had to tear himself away, carrying off with him a picture of Melusina placing the bouquet in water, and looking back at him with a smile which haunted him for many a day to come.

CHAPTER IV.

SURPRISES.

IT was agreeable to Miss Meadows' feelings and of course flattering to her vanity to find herself the object of such genuine admiration as Mr. Argus Fairbairn displayed for her. To many women there would have been something touching in this youthful passion, so unaffectedly and modestly betrayed. But Miss Meadows' sensibility was not very acute; and then she had so many other things to think of just now besides young Fairbairn and his attentions; though occasionally some word or look of his, so unlike the looks and

words of most people she came in contact with, and revealing depths of feeling quite novel and unfamiliar to her, would set her off on tracts of thought that were rather confusing. For when you have seen but little unselfishness in your life, and don't understand anything of great passions, and hold most practical views on the subject of the affections, you are apt to be staggered by the revelation of an all-absorbing, disinterested love, capable of feeding on the smallest crumbs of comfort you deign to throw it.

“He's a dear, and it's a pity he hasn't a fortune!” said Miss Meadows, as she thought it all over to herself; and then, absorbed in the work and excitement incidental to her profession, she thought no more about him for weeks to come.

Meanwhile, Gus had returned to Oxford

and was working away with fair diligence, if not with much enthusiasm. He had resolved to try for honours, if only to please Mr. Staynes. Though socially inclined and fond of active pursuits, he had not made many friends at college. There was about him a certain reserve which those of his own age looked upon as pride or coldness. It dated from that change of character which took place in him in his seventeenth year, when his old warmth of disposition and readiness to attach himself to those around him received so severe a check. But as he was a good-looking, well-mannered fellow, with nothing priggish about him, he was well viewed by such companions as he made; some of them shared his taste for music, and as he had a capital piano, his rooms became a favourite resort of amateurs. One of the best

musicians of the party was a little man of the name of Carter, who played the violin. Either from a congeniality of taste, or from the fact of Carter's father and Mr. Staynes having been college friends years ago, there was a close acquaintance between the two.

One night after the party had broken up, and all were gone except Carter, Gus sat down to the piano and began to extemporize, a habit he often indulged in.

"By Jove, that's good ! Why don't you compose ?" said his friend, who had been listening attentively whilst he smoked a cigar.

"I do compose," said Gus, laughing, "a song of mine is sung by one of the finest singers of the day."

"Phew ! That's coming it strong. What's it called ?"

"Oh, the words are my own ; beastly

bad of course. Do you know any good verses to set to music? I can do the melodies, but I stick fast at the rhymes."

"Can't say I do; I don't read poetry; it's an awful waste of time, especially if you've got a good violin, which contains the whole essence of the thing, when once you know how to bring it out," said Carter, with amateurish conceit. "But you needn't seek long for words, any'll do; only wants 'heart' to rhyme with 'part,' and 'sorrow' with 'morrow.' What's this?" Carter took up a book from the shelf by his side as he spoke. "'Poems by W. E. T.' Don't know the gentleman."

It was the volume Sir William Severn had given to Gus, who as yet had hardly looked into it.

"Now here's the sort of thing you want," said Carter, reading over the titles; "'To

Lois Singing,' or this, 'The Voice of the Waterfall'—that's your style!"

Gus had not cared much for the prize poem; but when he came to look into the book, he discovered it contained some pretty little songs and one or two impassioned love sonnets, which seemed the very things he wanted.

"Try 'The Voice of the Waterfall,'" said Carter, as he got up to go, "and let it be awfully melancholy; something like the thing you just played. Get it done by the time I see you again," and the young man bade his friend good-night.

Left to himself, Gus sat with the book before him, reading it with an interest which was not all due to the poetical merits of the work. The titles of some of the songs attracted him; "To Lois Singing" was a charming little sonnet; "My College

Books " was a piece that had a personal interest for him now ; " Where'er I go, thy memory haunts me," chimed in with his feelings in connexion with Miss Meadows. He was surprised that he had not looked more carefully into the book ; but that first conventional bit of classicism had deterred him at the outset. He resolved to set one of the songs to music at once, and he sat down, whilst the fire was hot within him, to find a melody for "The Voice of the Waterfall."

Now if it had not been so utterly improbable, Gus could have fancied he had known the words of this song all his life. They had seemed familiar to him on first reading them, and this sense of familiarity grew upon him as he repeated the lines, sitting at the piano. Where could he have heard them before ? It must have been at

Llantgarvon; possibly Mr. Staynes had a copy of the book. But yet it was not Llantgarvon that the verses recalled; it was something earlier in his life. They evoked a dim picture of his mother teaching him to repeat them, as she sat gazing at the fire, or singing them in a low tone as he lay on his bed half asleep. Perhaps it was some confusion of later with recent recollections, but he could have fancied she had told him that that waterfall was a real one, and that when a little girl she had often heard it singing as she sat by their cottage door.

He dreamed of his mother again that night, as he used so often to dream of her once, but did so rarely now. He dreamed that they were sitting together hand in hand, under the verandah at Melbourne, as they had sat that night before he sailed for

England, when his mother had told him that he was always to remember Mr. Fairbairn and the boys when he said his prayers, and he had answered, "I shall pray for you first though." And whilst they sat thus, the moon suddenly disappeared and a great wind arose, and with the quick, purposeless transition of dreams, he was in a ship tossing in a storm, and it was the "Caledonia" being wrecked in Llantgarvon Bay (that hideous dream which used to haunt his pillow as a boy), only this time his mother was with him, and he was a grown man, and he was trying to rescue her as he swam on shore. And a great wave lifted them both on its crest and carried them high on to the beach, and they were saved; but when he looked at his mother, who was clinging to him, she was dead. He awoke crying out with fear.

For some days he was unable to shake off the recollection of the dream, and his mother was constantly in his thoughts. He had had no news from Melbourne for several mails. Mr. Fairbairn only sent him a few lines now and then, enclosed in his business letters to his brother. Every year Gus felt that the tie between him and his mother—the only tie of kindred, alas! he possessed—was growing weaker. Every year he felt more and more the want of a home and home-belongings, the absence of that natural right of loving and being loved which exists only in families. “Well, if he had few to love, at least he had few to shame!”—was the bitter comfort he drew from his position.

But these and like thoughts were driven from his mind, for a time at least, by certain musical festivities that were announced

in Oxford about this time. A grand concert was to take place for the county charities. Singers of repute were coming down from London. Amongst the names announced was that of Miss Melusina Meadows, which Gus beheld staring at him from a large placard, and felt his breath taken away in consequence. But Miss Meadows' name was in smaller type, and she had a smaller part allotted to her than the well-known songstress who was to take the leading soprano music. Of course Gus was disgusted, and doubted whether he should attend. A few hours, however, before the concert, this lady fell ill, and a printed announcement had to be circulated in the room, stating that Miss Meadows had kindly undertaken to supply her place on a very short notice. This spirited conduct prepossessed in Miss Meadows' favour the

majority of the undergraduate party, who persisted that the popular singer was "shamming," and that Miss Meadows ought to be encouraged for "her pluck." She was loudly applauded on appearing on the platform; and as she was becomingly dressed, looked vivacious and handsome, and sang to the very best of her ability, her success was complete. Gus, who sat amongst a party of musical friends, listened to their criticisms with an anxious ear, in the interval between the first and second parts. When a man he had never spoken to before said, "She rather reminds me of Madame Grisi," he felt inclined to clasp him by the hand, and swear eternal friendship on the spot. When a bumptious member of their musical meetings, who was considered a critic, remarked that "her phrasing was not bad," he forgave him

several past impertinences; and he never felt so sure of Christy Carter being a musical genius as when he said Miss Meadows' singing was the feature of the evening.

But if Miss Meadows had been successful in the selections from the "Stabat Mater," which formed the first part of the entertainment, she was triumphant in the secular music that followed. The sparkling aria from "Le Domino Noir," the charming cajoleries of Zerlina, the intricate roudes of somebody or other's waltz, were all capitally rendered. The last was encored, but instead of repeating it, she returned and gave a plaintive ballad, full of sentiment, and prettily conceived. It was the song Gus had composed for her! All the blood in his heart seemed to rush to his face at the first bar. He was delighted; he was frightened; he could hardly hear her in his

agitation ; but when he got calmer, she was singing in a way that made him feel proud of his own composition. Nothing could have given him greater delight. It was acknowledging his presence there in the most delicate way. "Of course she could give him no other recognition, and he had been unreasonable to feel disappointed at being denied admittance when he called that afternoon at the hotel." There was something charming in this little secret between themselves, and he felt as if it established a sort of confidence between them, and gave him a share in her triumph.

"She sang that ballad beautifully !" said Chilworth, the critical, as they sat at supper in Carter's rooms. "Her Mozart was not quite up to the mark, for those at least who have heard Persiani."

"It strikes me I've heard that same air

before," said Carter with a sly look, referring to the ballad, "and heard it too, not very far from where we are now sitting. Either I've dreamed it, or it used to come down the chimney, or through the open window of the rooms just over mine, last term," and he looked at Gus as he spoke, and winked.

"Come, out with it, Fairbairn. Don't shirk your laurels!" he cried. "You're the composer, I'll swear. Your face to-night would have let the cat out of the bag, if I hadn't known the air. Here's your health, sir; and may you always find your genius as well interpreted!"

"You're right, Carter, the song's mine, and I'm proud to own it, after the way in which it was sung to-night," said Gus, flushed and excited. "I will give you a toast, gentlemen,—the health of Miss Meadows!" and he rose to his feet, and

poured out a flood of eulogies, and talked a lot of high-flown nonsense, for the wine was getting into his head.

Gus had not a very distinct idea, next morning, of what else was said and done at his friend's supper-table; but he had a recollection of having talked incessantly, of being a good deal chaffed, and of having nearly quarrelled with some one who had spoken of "*females of that class*," meaning public singers.

"*Ladies* of that class, you mean, sir," was the prompt rebuke.

"Well, ladies are females, aren't they?" retorted young Pimlico; "I can't say I go much amongst them myself, except when I pay to hear 'em sing."


"Which is at the supper-saloons and music-halls, I suppose?" said Gus, with flashing eyes.

"No, at Her Majesty's Opera, where the Mater has a box on the grand tier, sir," replied the offended young gentleman, with dignity.

"And I suppose, Pimlico, you go behind the scenes and chuck the prima donna under the chin, eh?" said Carter, trying to divert the rising storm; "we've heard of your Don Juanism before now, you know."

The next morning, as early as permissible, Gus presented himself at Miss Meadows' hotel, with Carter, whom he had promised to introduce, and whose presence, he thought, might perhaps help to gain him admission. But the bird had flown. Miss Meadows had returned to town by an early train, and left neither letter nor message behind her. It was absurd, of course, to suppose she would, and so Gus told himself as soon as he had asked the question of

the waiter. There was nothing for it, but to write to her and tell her what happiness she had afforded him in the concert-room, and what disappointment he had felt at not having an interview before she left. It was almost of the nature of a reproach, so warmly did he write on this latter score. No answer came to his letter. He was in despair, and felt he had said too much ; but hope revived again, when shortly after he received an envelope addressed in Miss Meadows' writing, enclosing him a programme of a concert at which she had been singing, with the word "encored" written against his own song. A similar communication reached him ere long, bearing the Manchester postmark. Then again came one from a manufacturing town in Yorkshire, with the word "furore" appended to the same piece. Gus hardly



knew whether to rejoice or not at these successes; he felt half jealous of the public, and little grateful to the newspaper critics who blew the trumpet of Miss Meadows' praises. The laudation of some of these latter gentlemen had, he knew, been purchased through Mr. Brande's agency, and in anger he told himself that genius needed not the adventitious devices of Yankee puffery to establish its true place in "the World of Art." For as yet that same phrase had fine meanings to Gus, and indicated a sphere in which envy and jealousy and sordid considerations of all sorts had no place.

The term was drawing to a close when there came news from Australia which occupied his thoughts to the exclusion of all other subjects. He received a letter from Mr. Fairbairn, stating that he was

coming over to England with his wife, to see if the London doctors could do anything to restore her sight, which was growing rapidly worse, and that he intended bringing his two sons with him, to visit the Great Exhibition, and to make the acquaintance of their English relatives.

The joy with which Gus would at one time have received the news of his mother's coming was dashed now with other feelings that had grown out of the changes that had taken place in him, and in their mutual relations since last they met. There was no mention of the visit to England having been in any way influenced by the fact that it would bring about a meeting between them after this long separation. Gus noted the omission and felt aggrieved by it; but as the day

drew near for his mother's arrival, he felt his heart warming towards her as of old, and a strange excitement growing upon him as he thought of the coming meeting.

CHAPTER V.

A MOTHER AND HER SON.

THE declining rays of a Midsummer sun were shining over the broad waters of the Mersey, and the busy streets and quays of Liverpool were growing quieter with evening's approach, when Gus Fairbairn, who had arrived a few hours before at the hotel where he expected to meet his friends, strolled out for a walk in the neighbourhood of the river. A letter from St. Botolph's Court, stating that Mr. Andrew Fairbairn and family were now due, and might arrive at any hour, had caused him

to hasten from Oxford to Liverpool, where he had been awaiting the ship's arrival all day. Every hour he grew more anxious to see his mother, and to get over the first meeting with her husband and children.

"How would they receive him? Did any of them feel the excitement at the thought of meeting that he felt? Would not his mother and he each read in the other's eyes thoughts they were trying to suppress?" Such were the questions Gus put to himself, as he gazed down the river seawards.

There was a pleasant breeze rising from the river after the heat of the day. He had strolled so far that by the time the sun went down, he found himself in a shabby neighbourhood where town and country and river-shore mingled in un-beautiful confusion. One element only of

the picturesque was there, the glorious sky-tints in the west, which tinged both air and water with hues of gold and purple. He had grown hot and thirsty with his walk, and turned into a little inn before him (less shabby and dirty than any house he had passed for some time) and called for beer. He often wondered afterwards whether chance or fatality had guided his steps in that direction. The parlour was spotlessly clean ; the pewter pots glistened like silver ; the bow-window, which had a view towards the river, was adorned with the whitest of white curtains : in any other locality it would have been a comfortable hostelry. But the taint of a low neighbourhood seemed here likewise. A quarrel was going on in the next chamber, and a woman's voice, harsh and loud, was raised to such a pitch of

fury that a grey-headed old man dozing over his pipe by the hearth, woke up, and muttered, "At it again, ye hear! My missus has got a rasping tongue, ain't she? She won't let the lass be, ye hear?"

Gus *could* hear, and felt so little patience at what he heard, that he said, "If she's your wife, why don't you stop her?"

The old man, who looked more like a broken-down farmer than a publican, gave a grunting laugh, and answered, "Easier said than done. Her first husband couldn't stop her tongue; no more can her second; no more could her own son, who swore whichever side o' the globe his mother lived on, he'd live on t'other, and he kept his word too."

Gus made haste to swallow his beer and depart, for the sound of one woman's voice sobbing and another's raging was more

than he could endure. As he was about to leave, the door was flung open, and a young woman rushed in from the adjoining room, crying out, "Master, master ! she'll turn me into the streets, she says. Don't let her—oh, don't let her."

She was a stout, red-haired young woman, of no soft or pleasing type, and who looked capable of holding her own against her sex in general, but either a knowledge of her own misdeeds or the fury of her mistress had quelled her.

The old man got up, trembling with excitement and with his infirmities, and went into the next room, whence issued sounds of remonstrance on his part—of anger and contempt on his wife's. Gus could not help overhearing their conversation. At last the husband cried,—

"I'll have no more turning o' young

lassies out o' doors. Ye tried it wi' your own niece once, and ye knows what came on it. If ever God Almighty 'llows you to come nigh my brother Owen, ye'll have to answer him for what happened to his daughter as was trusted to our care, poor soul!"

The old man returned to the room flushed and excited, and with the torpor of age thrown off. He was followed by his wife—an elderly woman, but upright and hale, and with a face as hard as flint. It was a face filled with an evil temper, as she stood in the doorway, and cried,—

"I say she *shall* go, and this very night, or I'll have her up before the magistrates in the morning as sure as my name's Williams. And for you to stand there abusing your wife in the hearin' o' customers, and raking up the name o' your good-for-nothing niece, who'd ha' been

hung for child-murder, I shouldn't wonder, if I hadn't got her out o' the country. I say it's a shame, and—"

The woman stopped suddenly, with a gasp and a look of horror on her face. She was staring at Gus. She advanced a few steps, then stopped, and throwing up her arms, cried out, "It's Owen Williams! The Lord ha' mercy on me!" And she staggered back into the next room, and fell upon the floor in a fit.

When the hubbub that followed had subsided, and the women in the house had carried off the stricken termagant to a room up-stairs, the old man returned to the parlour, and coming up to Gus, who stood awaiting some explanation of this strange scene, laid his hand upon his arm and scanned his features closely.

"She's right," said he; "ye've got

Owen's own eyes, and your mouth's the very mattler o' his. My sight's fallin' off, or I'd ha' seen it as soon as you came in. I ask your pardon—no offence, I hope?"

The last words were occasioned by Gus's having roughly shaken off the old man's hand.

"What do you mean? Who is Owen? What are you talking about?" He asked impatiently.

"Owen Williams was my brother, sir," replied the old man slowly. "A fine fellow he was at your age, wi' plenty o' schooling, and a voice that might have made his fortune, if he'd only gone the right road. There wasn't his equal in all Wales, five and forty years ago, for singing and playing; but killed himself wi' drink, he did, and was buried at my expense."

"It must be a strong likeness indeed

between us, if the sight of me is enough to send your wife into a fit!" said Gus, with an embarrassed air.

"Humph! Mebbe it ain't the likeness alon'," said the old man grimly; "she's used to go off into fits when her temper's roused. Temper! Why, there wasn't ever such a cursed temper as hers. She harried my poor niece a'most to death; and when things went wrong wi' her along of a villain, her aunt was the worst enemy she had, and may well not like to hear the name o' our poor Lois mentioned to this day."

"Who is it you are speaking of?" asked Gus, changing colour, and a dread of some coming disclosure seizing him.

"O' Lois Williams, sir, my brother's child, who'd ha' been in her grave this many a year, if she hadn't met wi' better

friends yon side the globe than she did o' this. But what's it all matter to you, young sir? I ask yer pardon for my rambling talk," and the old man sighed, and returned to his seat by the hearth.

"It matters nothing to me, of course," began Gus, whose excited face belied his words; but he stopped and added, "I will wish you a good night," and he hurried away from the house without another word.

He had not the courage to put the questions that hovered on his lips, and yet he was almost certain that the old man was speaking of his mother. He knew nothing of her family, except that they had been in humble circumstances, and came from Wales. The name of Williams was common enough there, but Lois was not. And then there was the likeness between himself and this Owen Williams which had so startled

the woman. Altogether he felt confused and agitated, and the possibility of these people being kinsfolk of his mother filled him with a sense of shame. The thought was unbearable, and Gus drove it from him, telling himself that he had lost his judgment through thinking too much of his mother's coming.

The next day the ship arrived. Gus was on the landing-stage, trying to make out his party on the deck of the steamer. At last he singled them out. Yes; there they were! A big, broad-shouldered man, with two youths by his side, and a lady closely wrapped in shawls, who had to be carried on shore in a chair by the sailors. The lads kept close by her side, and the gentleman followed a few paces behind. Gus advanced to meet them. None of them knew him; but he


was sure that grave-looking man was Mr. Fairbairn, and he was going to put out his hand to him, when the elder of the youths exclaimed hastily, "Come here, father, mother is ill!"

But the lady, who had raised her veil, and was looking fixedly at Gus, murmured, "No, no; I shall be better soon. Tell him to come nearer."

As Gus drew closer to her chair, she raised her eyes to his, and in a low voice said, "My boy!" and then, whilst her hand was still stretched out to him, the light suddenly faded from her face, and she fainted.

His mother's agitation at the sight of him was very painful to Gus, so also was the alteration he beheld in her appearance. He would hardly have known her; save the pleasant voice and the slight figure and deli-

cate features of former days, there were no traces of the pretty young mother he remembered in his childhood. Looking at her as she sat, some hours later, in a shaded room (Mrs. Fairbairn's sight was too weak to bear the light), he beheld a frail, delicate-looking woman, with a mild, sad countenance, and hair slightly tinged with grey. Nothing in Mrs. Fairbairn's manner now betrayed her humble origin. Twenty years' companionship with an educated, intelligent husband (a good man too) had given Lois Williams the appearance of a gentlewoman. Her natural refinement had developed, and the graces of a loving, gentle disposition had thriven under the genial influences of later years. It was evident that she was almost worshipped by her husband and sons. They waited on her with a devotion that left little place for attentions from



Gus, who was shy and constrained with them all. Before twenty-four hours were over, the poor fellow had discovered that however kindly they might feel-towards him, habit and association had knit them all together in a tender intimacy in which he had no share.

It was decided to stay a day or two in Liverpool, to recruit Mrs. Fairbairn after the long voyage. Her husband had business to transact there, and so it devolved on Gus to show the lions of the town to the young Australians, both brimful of curiosity. Andrew, who was almost as tall as his father, and whom he resembled in face and character, was a thoughtful, intelligent fellow of seventeen, reserved with strangers, but very open and confidential with his parents, for whom he had evidently a strong affection. Johnnie was

a bright lad of fifteen, eager to see all the sights of a new land, full of questions, and with a spice of dry humour in his character that was quite Scotch.

The efforts their mother made to throw them all three together and encourage a brotherly intimacy amongst them were well-intentioned, but not successful. To the young Australians Gus seemed a grand and haughty person, who looked down upon them from heights of learning and social knowledge to which they had no pretensions. The very cut of his London-made clothes established a difference between them. While Gus from the first hour was ill at ease with them, and tormented with the question as to whether they knew anything, or how much of his own history and their true relations. Again, "the boys," as they were called, were upon those easy, loving

terms with their mother, of which Gus had also 'recollections, but which he felt could never be resumed in his case.

On the journey to London they saw after her wraps and cushions, and monopolized her with their talk, in a way that virtually, if not intentionally, excluded him. His mother seemed to notice this, and tried to draw him into the conversation, but with little success, for Gus withdrew more and more into himself. At these moments a cloud would cross Mrs. Fairbairn's face; her manner would become anxious and agitated; and more than once it entered Gus's mind that his mother, in a strange way, *was afraid of him*.

A furnished house had been taken for the family in Burlington Street, whither they drove on their arrival at Euston Square. Mrs. Luke Fairbairn had recom-

mended this arrangement, on the ground that "Mrs. Andrew" would be near her doctor, and Mr. Andrew felt grateful to her for settling it all, and sparing him trouble. He would have felt less grateful, however, had he known of a conversation that had taken place at Perth Lodge on this subject prior to their coming.

"Of course, we must ask Andrew and his wife to come and stay with us," said Mr. Anthony to his sister-in-law, discussing the visitors expected from Australia.

"I think not," replied Mrs. Luke, blandly but firmly. "Indeed, I think not. I shall of course make it my business to show them all proper attention, but I cannot undertake to receive her under this roof, especially with my daughter living here."

Mr. Anthony did not seem quite to see the force of this remark.

"No; I will show them all proper attention, and will introduce the poor thing to my own doctor, if necessary," said Mrs. Luke magnanimously; "but however well-conducted a person she may *now* be, one cannot—one ought not to overlook the past; and to bring her down here as Carry's aunt would be a mistake, as I think you will agree with me."

Whether Mr. Anthony did or not, he submitted to his sister-in-law's decision, for he was getting old and averse to domestic contests; and besides, he had already pledged himself to receive three other of his married brothers and their wives during the Exhibition season, and he knew he must not try his sister-in-law's obligingness too far. That he should see

plenty of his brother, in any case, he was aware; neither wives nor sisters-in-law would keep them apart.

But for some time after her arrival in London, Mrs. Andrew Fairbairn's health alone would have prevented her paying visits.

The eminent oculist they consulted gave small hope of restoring her sight. She received the announcement with fortitude, and was more affected, it seemed, by the thought of the trouble and anxiety that would be caused to others by her loss of sight than by any personal regrets.

"I am the last woman who ought to murmur, blessed as I have been these many years," said she, in a low voice to her husband, who sat holding her hand in the twilight, when the doctor had gone. "It is for you I grieve, and the boys. I

shall be a charge instead of a help now."

"And we shall resist the charge of course, and leave you to stumble over the stools and chairs, my dear, you may be sure. But we won't look on the worst side of things; you may yet be able to read the newspaper to me, when I'm an old fellow in the arm-chair at home," said the husband, striving to speak cheerfully.

Gus came into the room whilst they sat thus. Mr. Fairbairn rose and said, "Your mother is not in very high spirits to-day. I promised to take my lads out this evening. You had better stay with her."


"Wouldn't Gus like to go with you?" said the mother, looking wistfully at him.

"I have no desire to go, thank you," was the reply. "If agreeable to you, I will remain here."

They both noticed the curtness and formality of the speech. Mr. Fairbairn set it down as "Oxford airs" and a general want of amiability of character; the mother heard it with a sudden pain about her heart. It was the voice and demeanour of a stranger, not of a son. She had not seen much of him during the last few days. Gus had lodgings out of the house, and his time had been chiefly taken up in visiting amongst his acquaintance. Of these he began to talk to his mother when they were left alone.

"It is very kind of people in their station to take such notice of you," said she, alluding to Sir William and Lady Severn, of whose kindnesses her son spoke warmly.

"Yes; I suppose it is great good fortune for any one like me to visit at the



house of such a well-known man ; but it is Lady Severn I like and care to see. She is as kind as she is clever. When I told her you had arrived, she said she would call upon you, if you would allow her ; but I told her I thought it doubtful whether you would see visitors."

There was a pause. " Did her son feel that she was not the person to make the acquaintance of this great lady ?" asked the mother sadly of herself.

" Perhaps you did well," she said aloud ; " though I should like to have seen any one who has been a friend to you, and of whom you speak with fondness."

The tone of his mother's voice touched him ; it was sad and humble. " Any one of whom he spoke with fondness " ! Should he tell his mother then of her whom he loved ? For a moment he was tempted

to let out his secret. But he did not feel the fond familiarity of sons who make their mothers the confidants of their lovesorrows, and he contented himself by speaking only of the lady's talents.

"She must be very clever. I should like to hear her sing!" said Mrs. Fairbairn, as she listened attentively to her son's eulogies.

"You would, mother? Then I'll bring her to see you—I mean, I'll ask her if her engagements will allow her to come," said Gus, checking his own too-impulsive words.

It was the first time he had used the word "mother" in that spontaneous, natural way. Mrs. Fairbairn's heart warmed at the sound. From Miss Meadows, the conversation turned on music by a natural transition; and Gus, at his

her's request, sat down to play to

was a piano that had seen some
ice; but it bore a good name on
escutcheon, and had some fine tones

which Gus contrived to bring out.
Whether by accident or design, he wan-
ded off into some old Scotch and Welsh

His mother, lying on the couch,
saw him with delight and wonder, lulled
by strange reveries. She was a child
again, listening to her father playing
harp or violin. She was wandering
through green valleys, amongst bleating
sheep and birds and bees. She was drag-

her weary limbs along mountain-
sides, looking up wistfully into people's
eyes, in search of the pence they threw to

And when at last he paused and
passed into a slow movement of some great

master, full of pathos and subtle meanings, it seemed to express to her, in a way no words could render, all the sorrows, regrets, and troubled memories of her past life.

When Gus rose from the piano the room was getting dark. As he approached her couch, he could see his mother's cheek was wet with tears. His heart, softened at that moment by the music, suddenly melted towards her, and he stooped and kissed her. She took his hand, and, holding it in her trembling fingers, pressed it silently in hers. For some moments neither of them spoke. Then in a low voice she said,—

“I am very thankful I have lived to look on your face again, my dear. If I grow blind, as they tell me I soon shall, I can better bear it now.”

“Blind! Do they say that?” said Gus,

in a moved voice. "God is hard upon you, mother."

"Hush, my dear! Your mother deserves whatever chastening it may please God to send her." And then with a look of pain that made her mouth twitch convulsively, she added, in a half-choked whisper, "Would that all I deserve fell only on me, and not also on my poor boy!"

Gus answered not a word; but at that moment he could not return the silent pressure of his mother's hand.

CHAPTER VI.

A DIFFICULT POSITION.

ARGUS FAIRBAIRN never forgot that distressed look upon his mother's face, as she whispered that she deserved whatever chastisements God might send her. The direction of her thoughts was too well understood by her son. Further pursuit of that subject was impossible for him. It was dreadful to behold his mother's shrinking looks and averted eyes. Yes; these were moments when he felt that she was afraid of him, and when her face had a timid, beseeching expression,

so unlike the frank, motherly gaze she turned upon her other sons. With them and their childhood she had nothing but happy associations: in their presence she looked younger; they cheered her and bothered her and petted her, as big lads will pet an ailing mother. But when her eye fell upon Argus, her face would contract an air of sadness—sometimes of fear. These things, and the constraint he felt towards Mr. Fairbairn, drove Gus away from them, and for days together they saw little of him in Burlington Street.

Faithful to her word, Mrs. Luke showed Mr. Andrew's wife all the attentions promised, even to the recommending her own doctor. She also allowed her daughter to call, and to take fruit and flowers from their hot-houses up to Burlington Street. Carry quickly won her way to the invalid's

heart; she was the only member of the Fairbairn family with whom the poor woman was really at her ease, and Mrs. Luke found it more difficult to put bounds to their intimacy than she had foreseen when she first permitted the acquaintance. Carry would insist upon being left with Aunt Andrew, whilst the carriage took her mother to do her shopping or to pay other visits.

Sometimes Gus found them together, and those were perhaps the happiest moments he spent with his mother; for Carry had never lost her old influence over him, and he was more cheerful in her presence and more gentle than at any other time. One day, as they all three sat together, the roll of wheels outside announced a visitor.

“It is Lady Severn,” said Gus, at the

window. "She is only leaving a card; come probably to inquire after your health, mother. Shall I go down and tell her you would like to see her?"


"Yes; if it will not be troubling her, I should much like to see her."

It was difficult to detect anything like awkwardness in so well-mannered a woman, and yet there was a slight approach to it in Lady Severn's manner when she was introduced to Mrs. Fairbairn. The latter, timid at all times, was especially so before this great lady, until she discovered how gentle and gracious she was. Then she thanked her in grateful words for the kindness she had shown her son. Lady Severn's visit was a short one, but she left pleasant impressions behind her, and as Gus went down with her to her carriage she said, "I am glad to have seen your

mother. I can understand your telling me she was so pretty." The speaker's voice had again a slightly nervous ring, and she looked very pale as she entered her carriage and told the servants to drive home. ~

"What a pleasant woman!" said Carry. "I shall ask mamma to let me go to the 'At Home' she has sent us cards for. Of course you will be there, Gus?"

The civilities shown to the Fairbairns by the Severns had their origin in the friendly interest they took in Gus; but ere long there was an additional motive for such civilities—at least on Sir William Severn's part. The busy statesman was just now deeply engaged in emigration matters. The question of the accommodation provided for steerage passengers in emigrant ships was being thoroughly investigated by the Press, and was under discussion in the



House. An introduction to Mr. Andrew Fairbairn was therefore opportune, for that gentleman was able to afford him valuable information, and also to give evidence before a Committee of the House of Commons. Sir William was pleased with the straightforward, intelligent Australian, and invited him to dine with him in Palace Terrace, to meet a party of gentlemen interested in emigration.

“I am sorry to hear your wife is such an invalid,” said he to Mr. Fairbairn, “but we shall hope to see your son, who is quite an old friend of ours.”

But Gus excused himself, and Mr. Fairbairn went alone to the dinner, where he found himself kindly received by both host and hostess. Andrew Fairbairn told his wife all about this grand dinner on his return home, and described the notable

people he had met, saying "he should go back to Melbourne an inch taller," after dining at the table of a man whose name was well known on both sides of the globe.

Gus's frequent absences from his friends, and his declining the invitation to dine in Palace Terrace with his step-father, vexed Mr. Fairbairn. "I think work is the best thing for him," said he to his wife; "he would be better back at Oxford with his books than loafing about in London."

"But this is the holidays," said the mother, looking up anxiously. "A little pleasure is good for them at that age."

"A little—yes; but not pleasure all the day through; nor do I think the society of young officers and public singers very improving."

Mr. Fairbairn had found out where Gus

spent so much of his time. His acquaintances in Tyburnia Crescent were, to his thinking, discreditable; for Art was a world as unknown to him as the planet Neptune, and artists were a race of whose ways he was distrustful.

"They say she is a beautiful singer, and works hard to support herself and her father," said Mrs. Fairbairn gently.

"If the lady is so busy, it is a wonder she can find time to have an idle young man dangling about after her as he does," said Mr. Fairbairn. "Gus would be much better employed at Oxford, or down in Wales, working for his examination."

There was a pause, and then the mother made answer, "Perhaps you are right. I know you only desire his good. But—but you would let him come to London again before we leave?"

"Of course, my dear," said Mr. Fairbairn ; and he added that when he took his sons to see their relatives in Scotland in the autumn, she could have Gus with her all the time, if she pleased.

So it became necessary to intimate to Gus that he was spending his time unprofitably, and that his acquaintances were not considered desirable ones by his step-father, who thought he ought to be at work again. He listened to his mother with apparent calmness ; but when Mr. Fairbairn opened on the subject, he fired up at once.

"I am ready to return either to Oxford or to Llantgarvon to-morrow, whichever you please, sir," said he, addressing his step-father. "You have a perfect right to dispose of my time and movements, seeing how I am indebted to you, but in the

matter of the friends I choose, you must, if you please, allow me to judge for myself."

This speech, uttered with youthful arrogance, annoyed Mr. Fairbairn; but he signed to his wife, who looked agitated, not to speak.

"If I thought it for your good, I should even restrict you in the choice of your friends, if I could," said he calmly, but firmly. "You pass most of your time away from this house, so you will not miss us much here. For your mother's sake, I could have wished, however, that you had shown more desire for our society, and had not—"

"Stay, Andrew, stay!" said the mother, in a quick, sharp voice, and she rose from her sofa in her agitation. "I have wished him to be with his friends and enjoy him-

self. You don't understand ; he is older than the boys, and has his own companions, and has had to choose them for himself. There has been no one here all these years to influence and guide him, and we must not reproach him if—”

She stopped suddenly, as though frightened at her own words, and then, calming herself with a great effort, she looked at Gus and said,—

“We are only thinking of your own good, my dear : we want you to succeed at college. It is my husband's anxiety for you that makes him speak as he has just done. You will come to London again in a few weeks ;” and as she spoke she looked at her son in that plaintive, timid way which so troubled and touched him.

“I should be deceiving you, sir,” said Gus, turning to Mr. Fairbairn, “if I

allowed you to suppose that what you have just said will make me give up any of my present friends, so long as they are good enough to include me in their acquaintance. But, as I have said, I admit your right to dispose of my time, and exact from me some equivalent for all you have done, and are doing for me. I will write to my tutor at once, and leave town as soon as you please."

As he stood there, looking so white and haughty, Mr. Fairbairn could not but feel sorry for him, little as he liked his tone.

"If you will only work and do yourself credit yonder, that is all I want," said he, and he spoke in a gentler way.

But the mother, when she was left alone, shed some bitter tears, and murmured to herself, "Oh, my poor boy! They both

mean well, but they do not understand each other."

And Mr. Fairbairn, seeing his wife's sad face, rejoiced (just man as he was) that he was about to remove, even for a time, from her presence, a person with whom sorrow more than joy seemed always to be associated.

CHAPTER VII.

A MOMENT OF HESITATION.

SUCH deep silence had suddenly fallen on Lady Severn's drawing-room, that the tic-toc of the clock on the mantelpiece was plainly audible to the two persons who sat there. The conversation that had just preceded this silence had been as follows:—

“ I am leaving London to-morrow, Lady Severn ; and, after all your kindness to me, I did not like to go away without bidding you good-bye.”

“ But you have not yet told me why you are going away thus suddenly.”

“Oh, because my friends are anxious to see me at work again, and think I am in danger of getting into idle habits here. Such at least are the excellent reasons they offer for packing me off at this short notice.”

There was a moment's hesitation, and then the same person resumed—“But if I speak to you frankly, Lady Severn, I am going away because things will work more smoothly in the family circle without me.”

A pause. Argus Fairbairn looks down. Lady Severn, who was reading when he entered, closes her book, places it on the table by her side, and looks at him with attention.

“How do you mean — work more smoothly?” she asks.

“Well, you see, we have been so long apart that my presence is a constraint

upon them all; and—and there is a danger of collisions, which are better avoided.”

“Not collisions with your mother?” Lady Severn puts the question in a slightly hesitating tone.

“No; but collisions she may have with other people, of which I may be the cause. Step-fathers and step-sons are unfortunately apt to misunderstand each other, and then—why then the person who is the link between them has generally a hard time of it. We shall all of us be better friends apart, I have no doubt, though”—here the speaker’s voice changed—“it is a little hard to be sent into banishment again so quickly, and would be sadly disappointing if—if one’s expectations were large in the matter of motherly affection.”

Then came the long silence spoken of.

The last words, uttered in a low tone, had escaped the speaker under an emotion he had done his best to control.

Lady Severn sat looking at him with a face which had a sad and earnest expression.

“That is not the way in which you were used to speak of your mother,” said she, ere long; “I thought you loved her in spite of—of your long separation.”

“I both did and do love her, Lady Severn,” was the reply. “I have talked to you before now of the good reasons I had for clinging to her as a child; and if our affection has grown cooler, there is this long separation to account for it, and the claims of others who have come between us. It is all natural and right enough, of course.”

The tone of his voice belied his belief in the assertion.

“And you must show your acquiescence in what is right by working away yonder for their sakes,” said Lady Severn. “You will thus probably give more happiness to your mother than by remaining with her here. I suppose it is her wish also that you should go?”

“She would tell you so,” said Gus, shaking his head; “and give excellent reasons for supporting her husband’s views; but then, you see, my mother’s will has to bow to the will of other people.”

He stopped, and looking across at Lady Severn, who sat with the light of the lamp on the table by her side shining full on her face, said anxiously,—

“I came here to-night, Lady Severn, with two objects—one was to wish you good-bye; the other to ask of you a kind action which your goodness to me ever

since I have known you encourages me to ask. When I am gone away, I think my mother will miss me. She is in delicate health, and she has very few friends. If you were to—to go and see her sometimes, I should feel very grateful, and it would be a compliment which, I am sure, she would appreciate.”

Whilst he was thus speaking, Lady Severn had interposed the shade of a transparency between the lamp and her eyes. Either the colour thrown upon her face, or some inward emotion, gave a strange hue to her features, and altered their expression, as she slowly replied,—

“Did your mother ask you to make this request?”

Disconcerted by this question, and the new and cold tone of voice in which Lady Severn spoke, Gus made answer,—

"Certainly not. She is the last woman to propose such a thing, and unless you had shown a desire to make her acquaintance, and had each of you seemed pleased with it when made, I should not have ventured to ask this of you."

Lady Severn was long before she spoke again—so long that Gus was beginning to feel wounded and uneasy, when she suddenly looked up and said,—

"You have done quite right to ask it of me. I shall go and see your mother, and shall talk to her of the son whom I feel sure she loves, and whose confidence I am glad to have. I shall tell her that we are old and good friends, and that we hope to keep so. May I not?"

"You may indeed," replied Gus, surprised at the impulsive way in which she spoke, and blaming himself for miscon-

struing her silence. "This is not the first time," he added, "that you have made gloomy things look brighter to me, and helped to reconcile me to my difficulties."

"Life provides difficulties for us all," said Lady Severn, looking at him in a sad, grave way—"difficulties as various as our natures, and which try us often in our weakest points. We endeavour to excuse ourselves from confronting them, by most excellent reasoning. But there they are!—to be met, if we have faith and courage—to be shirked, if we are cowards and lovers only of self."

She paused a moment, conscious that she was speaking in an excited tone, and added more quietly,—

"I know you are disappointed by this unexpected decision of your friends, and by the sacrifice you are called upon to make.

Bear your disappointment bravely, and turn it to good account by working hard, and deserving the good opinion of those who have, perhaps, made sacrifices for you."

"Yes; my step-father has made sacrifices for me—pecuniary sacrifices, for which I am and ought to be grateful," said Gus, interpreting Lady Severn's words after his own fashion. "I will try to remember your advice, and I shall go away happier for all you have said to me."

Lady Severn rose from her seat, and holding out her hand to him, said, "I cannot ask you to stay longer this evening; my husband and I have an engagement at ten o'clock. Good-bye, Mr. Fairbairn. Tell your mother she will see me very soon. I will not forget your recommendation."

The clear vibrating tone of Lady Severn's

voice, as she uttered these words, and the expression of her eyes struck Argus Fairbairn at the moment. There was an intensity in her utterance of these simple words which impressed him strangely.

But when Lady Severn was left alone, the clear tone and open gaze were exchanged for a troubled look and faltering voice, as she leaned her head against the mantelpiece and murmured, to herself, "Oh, God, put strength into my heart. Thou knowest what weakness and selfishness are there, and how hard this thing may be for me to do."

CHAPTER VIII.

A VISION.

SO Gus was sent back to Oxford, and in the retirement of his tutor's house (an old college friend of Mr. Staynes had arranged to receive him), and in the enforced solitude of vacation time, he had opportunities enough for thinking over the treatment he had met with and the pleasures he had left behind him. Had Mr. Staynes been at hand just now, he would probably have devised some middle and less harsh course, which would have removed Gus from the temptations around

him and yet spared his pride, which was hurt by what he considered this tyrannical exercise of power on Mr. Fairbairn's part. But twenty-four hours after Mr. Staynes arrived in London (he had come up expressly to make the acquaintance of Mr. Andrew Fairbairn and his wife) he was recalled home by the sudden and dangerous illness of his mother, and only saw Mr. Fairbairn at his brother's office in the city for a few minutes. Thus it came about that Mrs. Fairbairn never beheld the man to whom her son owed so much, and never found the opportunity she so desired of expressing in person her grateful feelings towards him.

It was not in any calm or studious frame of mind that Gus had returned to his books. Study had never seemed less attractive to him, nor the rewards of scholarship less


worth striving after. There were other and fairer fields to which his eyes were now turned than these sober, moss-grown paths of learning; fields brightened by the sunshine of art, where his best powers and natural tastes (he told himself) would find scope, "and where honours might be gained, too, if only they would believe it—these narrow-minded Scotch pedants."

Whether inherited through his Welsh ancestors or not, the lad certainly had musical powers which, properly cultivated, might have brought him distinction. At times he felt bitterly that he was being forced into wrong grooves, which could only stunt or distort his proper development; and never did he more rebel against his lot than now, when he felt himself to be under this unjust sentence of banishment.

"Makes a fellow look a fool to be sent down

here like a schoolboy in disgrace!" said he indignantly to himself, as he shaved his nascent beard the first morning.

But he was even more vexed by the imputation cast upon his new acquaintances in London. That an Australian merchant—that even lords or ladies should presume to look down upon "the sons and daughters of Genius" as (Gus pleased to style some of his late companions), was to him outrageous. Here had he been congratulating himself upon his recent introductions into professional and artistic circles, to be told that "such acquaintances were not improving"—and that by a man who would not know an *andante* of Beethoven from a Scotch reel, if only the latter were played slowly. He resolved, by way of compensation, to devote every spare minute to the art he loved; and as



the organ of the church, where the friendly organist officiated, was almost always at his disposal now, he spent many an hour in hard practice, or in extemporizing melancholy strains, which much relieved his feelings.

Meanwhile his mother, tied chiefly to her sofa, passed the days sadly in her London lodgings, where the hot town air, and the close, high houses, and the strange sounds of the great city were all new and painful to her. She brightened when her husband or the boys were by her side, or when Carry Fairbairn came and read to her, or when Lady Severn called, and they sat and talked together of Gus; but she passed many quiet hours alone, when her thoughts, following her absent son, took a sad tinge, and her heart was heavy and oppressed. In spite of all that the doctors could do

for her, her health grew weaker, and all hope of her recovering her sight was fast disappearing. But this last affliction was a merciful one. Through it she was destined to be spared a shock that might have been fatal to her. The blow fell elsewhere, with cruel, stunning force, and upon a mind utterly unprepared for it.

August had come, and the last days of the Parliamentary session were at hand. Amongst the tired senators, none had more fairly earned their holiday than Sir William Severn. Late and early he had worked with the zeal of a man who lives chiefly for his work, and who finds in it both solace and reward. Though he had met Mr. Andrew Fairbairn on several occasions, he had never seen anything of his wife, and it might have happened that their paths, though now brought so near, might never

have crossed, but for a circumstance that was purely accidental, or which seemed such.

It happened one day, that Sir William Severn, who required some statistics from Mr. Fairbairn relative to Australian shipping matters, drove up to the house in Burlington Street, on his way down to Westminster. He was shown into the back drawing-room, which was used for business purposes by the merchant. Folding doors communicated with the front room, where sat Mrs. Fairbairn, engaged in some needle-work which required the use of hands more than eyes. It was a sultry day, and the doors were set ajar to admit air. Mrs. Fairbairn heard the visitor inquire for her husband as he entered. At the sound of his voice, her fingers instantly ceased their work, and she raised herself in her easy

chair with a frightened look, straining her dim eyes in the direction whence the sound proceeded.

“Who is that?” she asked abruptly of the man-servant, who entered the room to inquire when Mr. Fairbairn would return.

“Sir William Severn, ma’am. He wishes to know whether he can write a letter, as Mr. Fairbairn is not in?”

“Yes, certainly,” she spoke calmly and in her usual voice; “tell Sir William Severn I expect Mr. Fairbairn will be home very soon.”

She relapsed as suddenly into her old composure as she had quitted it, though she did not resume her work, but lay back pensively in her chair, and more than once turned her sightless eyes towards the inner room, where the visitor sat writing his letter. Ah, if she could

have known who it was that sat there within a few yards of her !

Sir William Severn had seated himself at the writing-table, and his pen was at work and his mind full of the business in hand, when, raising his eyes, he beheld, through the half-opened doors, the quiet figure in the next room. The Venetian blinds were down, and a subdued green light filled the room. For the first moment Sir William only noticed that a lady sat there in her easy chair, with books and flowers on the table by her side ; but, as he looked at her, his gaze became suddenly arrested. As long as he lived he never forgot the shock of the next moment. His heart gave a great bound, and then as suddenly seemed to stand still.

Was it some vision that his own tired brain was creating ? Was he dreaming

or ill? Yonder, with the shaded green light falling upon her quiet figure, sat Lois Williams; altered, and yet the same; older by many a year, but still fair and comely, and with, at that moment, a dreamy look upon her face, which he remembered so well of old. A cold sense of fear fell upon him, and he could with difficulty get his breath. Then he got up to advance towards her, but before he had gone two paces, he stopped.

Good God! what was he about to do? It was Mrs. Fairbairn, not Lois Williams, who sat yonder—the wife of the man he was expecting, and who might enter the room at any moment. He had sufficient self-control to resume his seat quietly, mindful not to draw her attention upon himself.

What did it all mean? He felt like a man waking from a deep trance, which has lasted

so long that the world has all changed around him, whilst he slept. Lois grown older, her hair grey, her dress and manner that of a lady, but Lois all the same. How had it come about? He tried to connect the present with the past; but out of that past came a flood of such poignant recollections, that he could not bear to look on the sad-faced woman, who sat there unconscious of the eyes that watched her. He had got up to leave the house, when there came footsteps on the stairs, and he heard the sound of Mr. Fairbairn's voice. Instinctively he closed the folding doors into the next room, and then stood awaiting the husband's entrance.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, Sir William," said the merchant as he entered, and he put out his hand to his visitor.

Sir William took it, but his own was icy cold. How could he dare to take that man's hand in his? With almost a superhuman effort at self-control, he made answer calmly, "I was writing to you, Mr. Fairbairn, to save time; but three minutes' talk with you will be far better;" and he proceeded at once to the matters that had brought him there. He spoke nearly in his usual voice, but he looked white and seemed exhausted. He condensed what he had to say into a few words, in his usual prompt, business-like way, and then took his leave.

"I'm afraid Sir William Severn is very much overworked," said Mr. Fairbairn to his wife, as he joined her in the next room. "He looks wretchedly ill to-day, and yet he's off to the House, where I expect he will make a big speech to-night. What a killing life these men lead!"

Sir William Severn went down to the House and made his speech, as masterly and exhaustive a one as he had ever delivered, and for many hours to come was absorbed in business to the exclusion of all private feelings. But when, after midnight, he reached his own doors and threw himself into his library-chair, without heeding his servant's inquiry whether he had any orders to give, he looked so ill and haggard that the man felt alarmed. He dismissed him, however, saying he was only very tired. When the door had closed, and at last he was alone, Sir William Severn covered up his face with his hands, and set himself, for the first time, to think over the meeting of that day.

But as he tried to disentangle the confusion of his thoughts, and to measure the consequences this discovery might involve

for himself and for others, he felt himself overpowered. A low groan escaped his lips, and, his head falling back, he became for some minutes insensible.

CHAPTER IX.

BITTER MOMENTS.

ON the morrow Sir William Severn was absent from his usual resorts. It was rumoured in the clubs that he had had a fit on returning home from the House, after that brilliant display of his powers, and that his man had found him lying on the carpet, foaming at the mouth. Sagacious persons had foreseen that "No man could stand that sort of life for long,"—and due moralizings had followed on the high intellectual pace at which we live, and the dangers of this continuous mental

strain. But Sir William Severn had had no other fit than a fainting one, and was, as far as his household knew, only suffering from a temporary indisposition brought on by the heat and overwork. He was busily engaged in his library with his private secretary, at the time when he was reported to be lying paralyzed on his bed.

The suffering of mind he was undergoing, however, far exceeded any of the physical sufferings the most inventive of newsmongers attributed to him. He had come gradually to understand the whole position of matters, and to realize all that this terrible discovery involved. Lois Williams had gone to Australia, had there married a good and honourable man, and, under his influence, had become the woman he now beheld her. And all these years

she must have looked upon the man who had deserted her as a cruel, faithless scoundrel. A stranger had taken compassion upon her and her child, and even permitted the latter to bear his own name. The outline of Argus Fairbairn's history had already reached Sir William Severn's ears, through words let fall by his friend Staynes. He could fill in all the details for himself. The unhappy fellow was *his own son* !

And now, how was he to act in the face of this discovery ? His first inclination was to see Mrs. Fairbairn, explain the circumstance that had parted them, and clear himself of some part, at least, of the odium he merited. But he shrank (as well he might) from obtruding himself upon her presence.

How could she bear (ill too as she was)

to behold again the man with whom such a miserable episode in her life and such cruel griefs were associated! "No meeting now," he told himself, "could efface that picture of him which she must have borne in her mind all these years." He knew not that she, in her higher faith, had long since absolved him, in the firm conviction that death, or circumstances irresistible as death, had alone parted them.

Sir William Severn was, and had been all his life, a strange mixture of moral cowardice and moral sensitiveness. No one who saw only the public side of his character could have believed that he ever wavered, or found it so difficult to play the brave part, as he did. He determined, after many hesitations, to write a letter to Mrs. Fairbairn. But when he had written it, he did not dare to send it.

What right had he, at this distance of time, to rise up like a spectre in her path, to throw confusion into her life, or jeopardize, in any way, the relations between herself and her husband? They were happy together; let them be so. Her life had passed into still waters for now many a year; was he the one to raise storm or cloud about it once more?

But there was a duty he owed elsewhere, and which, thank God! he could discharge. To his son he could, in some sort, make reparation. The thought moved his heart strangely. He must aid and befriend the poor fellow. But how was it to be done? He could not at once disclose their true relations. A likely way, forsooth, of winning the good-will of a high-spirited young man, to disclose himself as the betrayer of his mother!

He must first win his regard, by gradual and natural means. Then, some day, when habit and long kindnesses had brought them to a closer intimacy, he might, perhaps, dare to make what, under any circumstances, must be a most painful disclosure.

Thus resolved the unhappy man, and tried to take such comfort as he could from the course he had determined upon. But there was further pain and humiliation in store for him. The new attitude in which he now stood towards Mr. Andrew Fairbairn—a man whom he liked and respected, was a source of anxiety and shame. When, a day or two later, the Australian merchant called upon him, Sir William Severn had to invent some disingenuous excuse for not seeing him. His cheek burned at the lie; but if he wavered

and was cowardly, he was not a hypocrite. He could not, with a smiling face and friendly mien, receive the man whom indirectly he had so grievously injured. It was a position which might have tried the moral courage of any man, and which produced very difficult and embarrassing situations. Even when their carriages passed in the drive in the park, Sir William Severn studiously turned his head in an opposite direction, though by doing so he laid himself open to the charge of caprice or downright incivility.

The effect of these things was to make him look so ill and worn, that his wife longed anxiously for the moment when they could quit London. Fortunately Sir William's public duties were just drawing to a close; and so when next Mr. Fairbairn presented himself in Palace Terrace,

he learned, to his surprise, that the member for Severnborough had left London over-night for his country seat. This conduct seemed unpardonably rude. Sir William was under obligations to him, and yet he had been twice denied the door without sufficient reason. It was evidently the "cut," and the offended merchant turned away in disgust.

But he had weightier things to trouble him just now than the caprices of a great man. With a sorrowful heart, Andrew Fairbairn beheld his wife growing daily more feeble and suffering. Counting no longer upon anything that medical skill could do for her, he began to long to get back to his own home and his business. He started off for Scotland with his sons, leaving his wife with Gus (who had been as suddenly summoned away from Oxford

as he had been sent there) to bear her company.

Many a time afterwards Gus looked back with satisfaction on those days he spent alone with his mother. With no one to come between them or fetter their intercourse, their relations grew more affectionate and intimate than in all the preceding weeks. He accompanied her daily on her drives, or walked beside her bath-chair under the trees in Kensington Gardens. He read aloud to her the books she most liked, and played to her the music she best loved. He was attentive to all her wants now the others were not there to anticipate him.

But the happiest day of all this time (one of the happiest days of his life) was when Miss Meadows came and spent an evening with them in Burlington Street, and sang

some of her best songs to her admiring listeners. Miss Meadows' compliance had been partly the result of good-nature—partly of self-interest. She felt so sorry, she told Gus, for his poor "Mamma;" and then she always liked to oblige, when she could do it easily; and, moreover, there was her pupil at Perth Lodge to consider, for Miss Meadows was giving Carry Fairbairn singing lessons at a guinea each—a fee not to be despised.

"Did you ever hear such a voice as that?" asked Gus of his mother, with still a glow of excitement on his face, when their guest had gone. "Did I say too much?"

"Not of her voice, I'm sure: it is most beautiful."

"I said too much, then, of her in other respects?" he asked, in a piqued tone.

"She is not—not quite what I had ex-

pected, I think," said the mother timidly ;
"but then, you see, I have never seen a professional before."

"Professional!" Gus spoke with a mocking air. "I hope, mother, you don't echo that vulgar nonsense (of which I'm getting rather tired, by the way) about 'professionals.' If Mrs. Luke Fairbairn and her friends can afford to look down upon them, I don't think you and I can."

He felt sorry he had spoken the hasty words, when he saw the flush that overspread his mother's face.

"I did not mean that," said she quietly, and with a dignity that was not unbecoming. "Nor do I look down upon the humblest of my fellow-creatures, I hope ; but I had thought from your own description of Miss Meadows that she had been rather different—that is all."

Gus sighed, and was silent. "Ah, here again," thought he, "was another instance of that prejudice which could not regard the class to which Miss Meadows belonged without certain preconceived antipathies."

But his mother's last days in England were drawing near, and he could not find it in his heart to be long angry with her on any subject. He felt touched, and yet somehow pleased, at the signs of sadness she showed as the day of parting approached.

As they sat together the last evening, his mother's depression was painful to witness. She had an unexpressed conviction that this parting would be their last, and she could not but regard with anxiety the future of her son, for whom there would soon not even be the poor protection of her love.

Mr. Fairbairn and his sons had gone to bid their friends farewell at Perth Lodge, and so they were alone. What passed between them that last evening Gus never revealed to any one. But that the conversation with his mother had produced some powerful impression upon him was certain; for when Mr. Fairbairn and his sons returned, they found him sitting alone, with his elbows on the table and his face buried in his hands.

“Well, my lads, it’s late, and time we were all in bed,” said Mr. Fairbairn. “You will come round first thing to-morrow, Gus, and say good-bye to your mother, eh?”

“I have said good-bye to her to-night,” said he, in a voice which he tried hard to keep from faltering; “and as I had better not see her again, I will say good-bye to you all now.”

The leave-takings that followed were short, but not unkindly. When they were ended, Gus walked back to his lodgings, sad and depressed. But his mood had changed from sadness to anger ere he slept. With tightly-set teeth and a clenched fist, he muttered a curse against some person on whom his thoughts ever turned with growing hatred as he grew older—a hatred intensified at that moment by a vivid recollection of his mother's gentle face, lined with those ancient sorrows which made it old and care-worn before its time.

CHAPTER X.

A GOOD FRIEND AND A GOOD WIFE.

THE relief that Sir William Severn always felt in getting away from London, and finding himself amongst the woods and hills of his beautiful country seat had been greater than usual this year, but the benefit to his health seemed less. A strange, nervous depression had set in, after the first few days, from which he could not rally, and which was observed with disquiet by his wife. She had put off their expected guests in consequence of his indisposition before leaving

town, and they were alone together; but instead of taking their customary drives, and finding the hundred common interests in their property of former times, Sir William preferred to remain indoors with his books, or take solitary strolls in the grounds, or a long ride to a distant farm, without seeking the companionship of his wife. That lady noted these things, and observed her husband with a more watchful attention than he suspected. So apparent was it to the household that Sir William was not at all like his usual self, that the old housekeeper advised her mistress to have a doctor down from London at once. "It can't be right, my lady, that his appetite should give way in such a lovely air as this," said she. "I never knew it fail after a week at Severn Hill, however poor it may be when he comes down from town." But Lady Severn was

inclined to think that a London doctor was not the right physician for the case. She waited one week more, and then, as her husband still withheld from her his confidence, she applied to another and a non-medical adviser, to whom she wrote as follows :—

“MY DEAR MR. STAYNES,—We were disappointed not to see you in town before we came away, and consider ourselves entitled to an early and a longer visit here. If you could make it convenient to spend some time with us *now*, we should be very pleased, and you would be doing us a real kindness. My husband has been much overworked this session, and came down here exhausted in mind and body. I have put off all our visitors, but I am sure the society of an old friend like you would be good for him in every way. He is suffering, I fear, from nervous depression; and

you, who know him so well, will see at once how unlike his old self he is. If you can come, I shall feel relieved. We will send the carriage to meet you at Severnborough any day, if you will let us know the hour of your arrival.

“ Believe me,

“ Yours very truly,

“ HELEN SEVERN.

“ P.S.—It will be a pleasant surprise to my husband, and prevent him thinking I am unduly anxious about him, if you write and propose the visit as from yourself.”

Within a few days of his receipt of this letter Mr. Staynes had arrived at Severn Hill, right glad to serve his friends in any way. But the good effects of his society did not seem so apparent as Lady Severn had hoped. And yet, with a fine instinct, she had taken the very best means for

alleviating her husband's strange indisposition. In alluding to it to Mr. Staynes she spoke rather vaguely, but he gathered from what fell from her that she feared its causes were more moral than physical, and that he had something on his mind. The subject was so lightly touched upon, however, that Mr. Staynes was left pretty much to his own conjectures.

Before many days had gone by, it became evident to both of them that Sir William was shunning his old friend, much as he had shunned his wife. Once or twice Mr. Staynes fancied he was about to make some communication to him. He had a way of breaking off the conversation suddenly, and turning it in new directions with a sort of purpose. But neither his silences nor his ill-connected sentences led to anything. There came a day, at length, when all that he was suffering—all that he

was struggling against, was made known to his distressed and astounded friend.

The clergyman who officiated at Lady Severn's little church at Severn Hollow had asked Mr. Staynes to undertake the duty for him for a couple of Sundays. Severn Hollow was a little hamlet on the outskirts of the park, and the new church there had been erected by Lady Severn in memory of her late father.

When Sunday came, Sir William walked over to the church with his friend, and met his wife in her pony-carriage at the church door. The congregation was almost entirely composed of work-people on the estate and the servants from Severn Hill. A quieter, simpler gathering could hardly be found, and the style of sermon that followed was quite in keeping with the auditory. Mr. Staynes, who was never

more at home than when addressing village hearers, had chosen for his discourse the homely theme of the duties of parents and children, on which he expatiated with force and earnestness, dwelling especially upon the obligations of the former, and their large influences for good or evil. After painting the happy household, of which the father and mother are the honoured heads, he drew another picture of the home where neither love nor reverence are given to its elders, and not given because not deserved. Then he reminded his hearers, in solemn language, of that ancient and awful law of God—still unrepealed—which proclaims that the sins of the fathers are visited upon their children from generation to generation; and then, to drive home its application, he showed them, by examples drawn from daily life, that the worst

consequences of a man's misconduct do often fall upon his innocent offspring.

And the earnest words of the preacher went to the hearts of all his hearers; to one amongst them, they sounded like the reproaches of his own conscience made audible. He sat listening with lips tightly compressed, afraid to look the preacher in the face, lest he should see there that his words were specially directed against him.

When the service was ended, Sir William accompanied his wife to her carriage, and walked home with Mr. Staynes, keeping almost an unbroken silence. The rest of the day he spent chiefly in his own room, pleading a headache. But that night, as they were about to retire, he called his friend back into the library, and said,—

“ I was much struck with your sermon

this morning. I want to know whether you had a purpose in preaching it?"

"I should hope so!" replied Mr. Staynes, not without a smile. "I generally try to have a purpose, and I fancied it was a pretty plain one this morning."

"No, no! I mean, had you a special purpose? Were any of your remarks addressed to some individual hearer?"

"Certainly not," said his friend, with an air of surprise. "How could that be, when I know the congregation here so slightly?"

There was a pause. Sir William had resolved to tell him everything; but the thought of what he would lose in his old friend's estimation paralyzed his nerve. He knew well enough what a high opinion Hugh had of him—how he had admired and looked up to him all these years—and

he knew what pain and disillusion this discovery would involve.

“Don’t you fell well?” said Hugh, observing the change in the other’s countenance. “What’s the matter?”

“Yes; wait a moment. I shall be all right presently.”

As he spoke, Sir William took a turn up and down the room. After a few moments he returned to his chair, and said,—

“Sit down, Hugh, I have something to tell you. Your words to-day went like knives to my heart. Had you planned them ever so skilfully they could not have touched me more surely.”

Staynes looked surprised and said,—

“I don’t understand you.”

“No,” was the answer, and Sir William looked steadily at his friend; “you have never understood me. You have believed me to be a man of the strictest honour.

You have looked up to me, I should not wonder, as your superior. You have fancied, also, that you had my closest confidence, and that I had no secrets from you. Now you shall hear what a miserable secret I have kept all these years, and how I have deceived you and all around me;" and, without pause or break, he told the miserable story to his friend.

"And now how am I to act?" he asked, when he had done. "Am I to disclose myself as a father to this poor lad, or let him continue in his false position, dependent on the charity of Mr. Fairbairn?"

It was some moments before Mr. Staynes made any answer. The shock had been a very great one to him, and he felt (as the other had foreseen) that it was another man, and not his old friend, who stood before him. The tears gathered in his eyes as he made answer slowly,—

“I am more grieved by what you have told me than any words could express. It seems almost incredible. I would give much, very much, for it not to be true.” He stopped, unable to articulate, and after a pause went on, “I cannot advise you how to act, until I have considered the matter carefully. I must think it over with more calmness than I feel capable of just now,” and bidding his friend good night, after a few more words he quitted the room with a distressed and clouded face.

Until after midnight Mr. Staynes sat meditating in his own room on this extraordinary disclosure.

It was painful to think of his friend having had this secret on his mind all these years, and very painful to recall those youthful days from which the secret, and the consequent disingenuousness it had

involved, first dated—a time when there had seemed to be such a complete and brotherly confidence between them. “He must have suffered greatly, and known many remorseful moments,” reflected Hugh. “I cannot have been so far mistaken in him.”

But with his sorrow for his friend there mingled a feeling of bitterness, when he thought of the wife who had looked up to him with such reverential love. A sense of indignation seized him, as he reflected on the pain that was in store for Lady Severn. But ere he slept that night better thoughts returned, and he knelt down and prayed for his unhappy friend, and for all those who had suffered through him.

Early the next day he sought Sir William in his library. Both men seemed anxious and constrained when first they met, but both felt relieved by the plain speaking

that followed—such plain speech as is only possible between old and tried friends.

“My advice, of course, is that you acknowledge your son,” said Staynes, at length, in his grave voice. “But as I know him better than you do, I tell you plainly that it will have to be done with great judgment and care—bearing in mind, that is, *the light in which he is prepared to regard you.*”

“You have heard him, then, express some feeling on that score?” asked Sir William, looking anxiously across at his friend.

“I have,” said Staynes, slowly and sadly; “I think I ought not to conceal from you, from any mistaken delicacy, that I have heard him speak with the strongest aversion of the man who stands towards

him in the position in which you stand."

Sir William's face twitched. Staynes resumed,—

"From long brooding on—on what he feels to be his own and his mother's wrongs, he has created in his mind an image of his father which it will be at first difficult to dispel. But you must be patient; and you must remember that he is young and full of warm feelings, and that his past history ought to make us very tolerant towards him."

Hugh's spectacles glistened as he spoke, with the tears rising in his eyes.

"Tolerant!" echoed his friend, lifting up his hand and letting it fall again on the chair-arm, with a sad, expressive action. "That you, Hugh, should have to stand there as his defender before his father,

and justify this aversion! No, no," he added, as Staynes, fearing he was misunderstood, sought to interpose a word, "you are right, I understand you entirely. What you tell me hardly surprises me. It will be my duty to try and overcome the aversion of which you speak." And after a pause, he added, "He will at least have no rivals in our childless house."

"If you are thinking of having him to live with you, as I infer from what you have just said," resumed Mr. Staynes, after a little reflection, "it would, of course, be desirable that your wife should be made acquainted with your true relative positions, before he enters your house. But perhaps you have already named it to her?"

Sir William shook his head.

"I would advise you to do so without

delay," said Hugh in a decided tone; and the conversation ended shortly after.

Sir William heaved a sigh, and sat with his face covered with his hands, long after his friend had left the room.

"Are you not going to drive this morning?" asked a voice, ere long, through the open window, and his wife stood there, attired for an airing.

"I shall not drive to-day," was the answer.

Her husband's voice startled Lady Severn as much as his face. As she entered the room, he got up, closed the window, and looking at her with a grave, pained expression, began,—

"Once before, Helen, I put your wifely love to a hard test. I have now to make another disclosure, and to ask of you a concession which you may, or may not, feel disposed to grant, but which rests

upon other and perhaps better grounds than your regard for me."

"That sounds hard, even if true," said the wife, a sudden flush colouring her cheeks.

"Yes; but though you love me, Helen, and of your love have given rare proof, you put duty higher than your love, I know."

There was a pause. Lady Severn sat down opposite her husband.

"Is the concession you have to ask of me grounded, then, on *duty*?" she said, in a low voice. "Is it grounded on *your* duty towards another person than your wife?"

He looked up at her quickly. She took no heed of the look, but went on,—

"Is it grounded on the claims of one who has a right to your help and protection second only to mine? I believe so," she added slowly; "but tell me what you are going to say."

With a wondering look, he made his explanation, and then begged his wife to answer him plainly and without reserve.

With a strange, grave light shining in her face, she replied,—

“My answer is that I have for some time past expected this explanation from you.”

“Expected it?” exclaimed the husband.

“Yes; I have known for some time that Argus Fairbairn was your son.”

“Good God! how was that possible?”

“I will tell you,” and Lady Severn related the various circumstances which had gradually led her to this belief.

“More than this,” she went on, “I saw Mrs. Fairbairn several times whilst she was in London, and knowing that I felt a warm interest in her son, certain confidences sprang up between us, which in the end confirmed all I had suspected.”

“And in the face of this knowledge you consent to his entering my doors again, and will help me to carry out my plans?” asked Sir William slowly.

“I will. It is your duty—I think it is also my duty—to do our best to make amends for the past, and to help him, if we can, to a happy future.”

“God bless you, Helen, for those words!” said Sir William, deeply moved.

He could not say more for some moments, but after a little silence, he added, in a new tone of hope, “What you have said brings me the first comfort I have known for many a day. Yes, poor fellow; we will help him to a happy future, God willing!”

END OF VOL. II.

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